

# PARISIAN SKETCHES

*by*

J. K.  
HUYSMANS

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*Translated by*

RICHARD GRIFFITHS

This book consists of a series of *eaux-fortes* or *croquis*. Most of the pieces have reference to painters and paintings: Hogarth, Rowlandson, Gillray, Cruikshank, Lancret, Watteau, Rembrandt, Gerard Dow, Schalken, Odilon Redon, and the anonymous prints of Damiens and the Wandering Jew. In the case of the *Image d'Epinal* and Cauchemar Huysmans is already practising his technique of verbal paraphrase of a painting, which was to reach its greatest height in *La-bas*, with the description of Grunewald's Karlsruhe *Crucifixion*, and in *Trois Primitifs*, with the description of the same artist's paintings in the Colmar Museum.

His picture of the *Folies* is purely decorative; no attempt is made to see *into* the lives and minds of the performers, but everything is treated as part of an over-all design, and we are left with an overwhelming impression of the sights, the sounds and the smells of this theatre with its *cachet boulevardier*.

Only in two of the Parisian Types do any hints of human sympathy occur, and even this sympathy is somehow detached, the poet confines himself to a description of the destiny of the prostitute and the washerwoman, and leaves us to our own conclusions. The other types are used purely for humorous description, or as the starting-points for fantasies. The Bus Conductor and the Chestnut-man see life as it passes them by; their jobs serve as the basis for descriptions of life.

The Baker's strange appearance leads to a comparison with Watteau's Gilles, while the Barber's shop is transformed into a kind of torture chamber.

The Overture to Tannhauser is the translation of the music into visual terms, portraying a fantastic landscape amidst which the author depicts with delight the evil figure of the Christian Venus.

*Damiens*, in which the author, on a brothel bed, sees himself in a mirror as the tortured assassin Damiens, is the first hint we got of the obsession with physical pain which is to mark the later novels.

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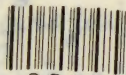
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PARISIAN SKETCHES



J. K. HUYSMANS

# Parisian Sketches

A translation of

## Croquis Parisiens

*by*

RICHARD GRIFFITHS

Based upon the 1886 edition,

*With introduction and notes by the translator.*

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## INTRODUCTION

" I WISHED to cure myself of the disgust (aroused on reading Zola's *l'Oeuvre*) by means of some kind of stimulant, and, on the most frequently visited shelf in my library, my hand found a little flask covered with the dust of years, one of those little flasks whose contents are to be tasted with the tiny, expert sips of an epicure."

So speaks Léo Trézenick in the weekly newspaper *Le Lutèce* (17th-24th April, 1886), referring to the *Croquis Parisiens* of Huysmans, which had first appeared in May 1880, but which had been re-edited, with the addition of several new pieces, the month before this article appeared. Trézenick goes on to contrast the style of Huysmans with that of Zola :

" One does not need to go as far as *A Rebours*, that beautiful, complicated melody, full of *morbidezza*, played on a single viol string, to be struck by the ever increasing difference between the personality of Huysmans and the talent of M. Zola, vulgar, clumsy, hardened and clogged as it is by an elephantiasis which grows thicker in every new work. To read the *Croquis Parisiens* is quite sufficient. . . ."

The period before the publication of *A Rebours* (*Against Nature*) in 1884, has often been considered as Huysmans' " Naturalist " period ; certainly in those early years he was very much associated in the public mind with Zola and the other writers who, with Huysmans himself, made up the *Groupe de Médan* : Léon Hennique, Paul Alexis, Henry Céard and Guy de Maupassant. The works which surround the first publication of the *Croquis Parisiens* are very near to the Naturalist ideal in their choice of subject-matter ; *Marthe* (1876), *Les Soeurs Vatar* (1879), *En Ménage* (1881) and *A l'au l'Eau* (1882) deal with such realist subjects as the lives of prostitutes and of the working-class ; yet Huysmans' style, even in these works, serves to differentiate him from his supposed colleagues. His powers of description, which were to remain with him throughout all the later stages of his career, served him as well in his aesthetic or in his religious novels as in his " Naturalist " ones ; and the colourful nature of his style shows

him to have been interested in description not as a means of social commentary, but as a means of artistic creation. If he is to be related at all to the Naturalists, his greatest affinity would seem to be with the Goncourts.

Zola himself saw the difference between Huysmans and his other companions; in his article on the *Croquis Parisiens*, published in *Le Voltaire* (June 15th, 1880), he describes Huysmans as "a virtuoso of language," and goes on to say:

"Truly, it is stupid to believe that so gifted a writer needed to attach himself to what has been so stupidly called the Naturalist school, in order to make his way in the world by bare-faced pastiches. He was already fully developed, when we first met; he had already shown the full measure of his forces in pages that had been published all over the place. . . ."

In this early period two works above all stand out against the Naturalist influence; these are Huysmans' first work, *Le Drageoir aux Épices* (1874) a book of prose poems composed very much under the shadow of Aloysius Bertrand; and the present volume, the *Croquis Parisiens* (1880), made up, apart from two poems from the *Drageoir* (*Ritournelle* and *Le Hareng Saur*), of various articles and prose poems published in magazines such as *La Cravache*, *l'Éclair* and *l'Artiste* in the years 1874-1880. In this volume the influence of Baudelaire, which had been latent in *Le Drageoir aux Épices*, becomes far more important in relation to that of Bertrand.

In a letter to Zola, written on May 20th, 1880, Huysmans describes his aims in the following terms:

"In the next few days you will be receiving my book of etchings entitled *Croquis Parisiens*.

"After the *Abbé Mouret*, which is the supreme, the great poem in prose—I should like to create little sonnets, small ballads, tiny poems, without the jingle of rhyme, but in language as singing as verse. From that point of view there are some pieces in the above-mentioned book which may perhaps interest you—as an attempt in this direction. . . ."

The author's aims, as expressed in this letter, are obviously formal; and the *Croquis Parisiens* stand or fall on their style and composition. They are exercises in expression, and in description.

The first edition was published on May 22nd, 1880, with illustrations by Forain and Raffaëlli. It contained the following pieces :

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| (1) <i>Les Folies-Bergère.</i>                | <i>The Folies-Bergère.</i>                |
| (2) <i>Types de Paris :</i>                   | <i>Parisian Types :</i>                   |
| Le Conducteur d'Omnibus                       | The Bus Conductor                         |
| L'Ambulante                                   | The Street-Walker                         |
| La Blanchisseuse                              | The Washerwoman                           |
| Le Geindre                                    | The Journeyman Baker                      |
| Le Marchand de Marrons                        | The Chestnut-man                          |
| (3) <i>Paysages :</i>                         | <i>Landscapes :</i>                       |
| La Bièvre                                     | The Bièvre                                |
| Le Cabaret des Peupliers                      | The "Cabaret des Peupliers"               |
| La Rue de la Chine                            | The Rue de la Chine                       |
| Vue des remparts du Nord-Paris                | View from the Northern Ramparts of Paris. |
| (4) <i>Petits Coins :</i>                     | <i>Forgotten Corners :</i>                |
| Ballade en prose de la chandelle des six.     | Prose Ballad to the Tallow Candle.        |
| Un Café                                       | A Café                                    |
| Ritournelle                                   | Ritornello                                |
| Le Poème en prose des viandes cuites au four. | Prose Poem of Roast Meat.                 |
| (5) <i>Natures-Mortes :</i>                   | <i>Still Lifes :</i>                      |
| Le hareng saur                                | The Red Herring                           |
| L'Image d'Epinal                              | Epinal Print                              |
| (6) <i>Fleurs de Narines :</i>                | <i>Bouquets for the Nostrils :</i>        |
| Les Similitudes                               | The Similitudes                           |
| Le Gousset                                    | The Arm-pit.                              |

It seems a pity that so many of the early reviewers of the *Croquis* should have concerned themselves with the shocking aspects of certain passages, and neglected the powerful beauty of the greater part of the book. Francois Coppée, in *La Patrie* of July 29th, wrote :

"The readers of the *Croquis* will join us in regretting that M. Huysmans' unhealthy imagination should lead him to write pages such as the prose poem entitled *Le Gousset*, which will permanently relegate his book to the *Enfer* section of public libraries."

Earlier, Zola had warned Huysmans of the probable reaction of the critics to *Le Gousset* :

"Ah! My dear Huysmans, you will have to pay for it, of that you can be sure. They will throw that piece in your face, together with your famous 'asses' piss'."

Huysmans was forced to confess, in a letter of June 15th, 1880 :  
 "People are beginning to consider me as an erotomaniac in great need of cold showers and camphorated potions."

By 1886, however, the literary value of the work had been sufficiently realised for a new edition to be published by Vanier "in the almost forgotten format of certain euchologies." Several new pieces were added, including a very long description, *Le Bal de la Brasserie Européenne a Grenelle*, which was taken from an unfinished novel about the tobacco-girls of Grenelle, to be called *Gros-Caillou*. This description was to have formed the first chapter of the projected novel, as we see in a letter from the author to Théodore Hannon, dated February 15th, 1882 :

"I am in the process of engraving the first chapter of my *Gros-Caillou*, a dance-hall full of tobacco-girls, foot-soldiers, whores and cuirassiers, and it's not going too badly. There's plenty of noise and stink in this chapter."

But by November 1882 he had decided to give up the novel : it "was not going as I wished ; I will take it up again when I am in a different state of mind." (Letter to Zola, Nov. 15th 1882.)

His mind was already turning to a new kind of book, "a gloomy, wild fantasy, crazy but at the same time realistic," which was to be *A Rebours*. *Le Gros-Caillou* was never to be finished.

The other new pieces in the 1886 edition were : *Le Coiffeur*, *Damiens*, *L'Étiage* (The Display), *L'Obsession*, *Cauchemar* (Nightmare) and *L'Ouverture de Tannhäuser*.

\* \* \* \* \*

By the very words he uses to describe his work Huysmans shows the importance of the descriptive element ; the book is a series of *eaux-fortes* or *croquis*, he is *en train de buriner* the scene from *Gros-Caillou*. Most of the pieces have reference to painters and paintings : Hogarth, Rowlandson, Gillray, Cruikshank, Lancret, Watteau, Rembrandt, Gerard Dow, Schalken, Odilon Redon, and the anonymous prints of Damiens and the Wandering Jew. In the case of the *Image d'Épinal* and *Cauchemar*, Huysmans is already practising his technique of verbal paraphrase of a painting, which was to reach its greatest height in *Là-bas*, with the description of Grünewald's Karlsruhe *Crucifixion*, and in *Trois Primitifs*, with the description of the same artist's paintings in the Colmar Museum.

The two artists chosen to illustrate the 1880 edition are typical of Huysmans' interests in this volume. They are the painters of modern life, of man's artifice rather than of nature.



Like Baudelaire, Huysmans claims to prefer the artificial to the natural, the incomplete to the complete. Raffaëlli's views of Paris' desolate suburbs, which are reflected in the section *Paysages* of the *Croquis*, are some of the few paintings spoken of with admiration in Huysmans' *Salon de 1879*. His description of them has some echoes in the *Croquis*:

"This artist reveals to us once more one of those landscapes he loves, one of the vast plains animated by factories which surround Paris, and he does it well!

Theophile Gautier has written somewhere that engineers spoil landscapes; it is not true! They simply modify them, and usually give them a more lively and obtrusive accent. The factory chimneys rising in the distance stamp the north of Paris, Pantin for example, with a melancholy grandeur it would never have possessed without them.

M. Raffaëlli is one of the few people to understand the original beauty of these places that are so dear to the intimists' hearts. He is the painter of poor people and the open sky!—His lonely rag-picker, with his dog, preparing to scratch about in a pile of refuse, is superb; he is taken from nature, and boldly drawn.

As with the large paintings of this excellent painter, I saw once again, in this water-colour, existences full of labour and misery; I saw once again, on plains where an old white horse grazes beside a cart which sadly raises its arms in the air, those scenes which invariably confront you when you go out from the ramparts: children sucking at dry breasts, and whole families mending old clothes and talking among themselves about the difficulty of keeping alive."

If the Parisian landscapes, and the figures of the poor "Parisian types", which we see in the *Croquis Parisiens* are inspired by Raffaëlli, it is to the other illustrator, Forain, that we must look for the inspiration of the description of the Folies Bergère and of the aging prostitute. In *l'Exposition des Indépendants en 1880* Huysmans acclaims him as the greatest painter of whores:

"Another curious painter of certain aspects of contemporary life is M. Forain. No-one can grasp as he does the promenade of the Folies-Bergère, and transpose its attraction of decay, its libertine elegance. . . .

. . . M. Forain is at his most spontaneous and original in his portrayal of the tart.

She has found in him her true painter, for no-one has observed

her more profoundly, no-one has more carefully caught her impudent laugh, her provocative eyes and her cynical air ; no-one has better understood the whimsical amusement of the way she dresses, with her enormous breasts thrust forward, her arms as thin as matches, her tiny waist, and her bust crammed into the armour which squeezes and reduces the flesh in one place, only to distend and increase it in another."

Huysmans' picture of the *Folies* is, as Miss Helen Trudgian points out in her admirable book *Esthétique de Huysmans*, purely decorative ; no attempt is made, as in Goncourt's *Frères Zemganno*, to see into the lives and minds of the performers, but everything is treated as part of an over-all design, and we are left with an overwhelming impression of the sights, the sounds and the smells of this theatre with its "*cachet boulevardier*".

The *Paysages*, too, are viewed above all as a design ; the sadness adds to their charm, but does not move the reader to pity. Huysmans deplores, in the paintings of Raffaëlli, any tendency to "that humanitarianism which spoils the paintings of Millet," (*L'Exposition des Indépendants en 1881*), and only approves of those paintings which approach the subject in a detached way. For him, these landscapes have a beauty of their own, which has no need of any emotional addition.

Only in two of the *Types de Paris* do any hints of human sympathy occur, and even this sympathy is somehow detached ; the poet confines himself to a description of the destiny of the prostitute and the washerwoman, and leaves us to our own conclusions. The other *Types* are used purely for humorous description, or as the starting-points for fantasies. The Bus Conductor and the Chestnut-man see life as it passes them by ; their jobs serve as the basis for descriptions of life.

The Baker's strange appearance leads to a comparison with Watteau's Gilles, while the Barber's shop is transformed, by exaggeration, into a kind of torture chamber.

Forain and Raffaëlli have led the author nearer to Baudelaire, the poet of Paris, the lover of the artificial, the transformer of the ugly. Though the subject-matter of the *Folies-Bergère*, the *Types de Paris* and the *Paysages* might seem to be naturalistic, the style and fantasy of the author have transformed it into something far more strange and exotic.



It is in the second half of the volume, however, that the fantastic element becomes pronounced. Here we are looking forward to the new Huysmans of *A Rebours*.

True, a certain amount is still owed to Aloysius Bertrand, whom Huysmans describes in *A Rebours* as having "applied the methods of Leonardo da Vinci to prose, and painted with his metallic oxides a series of small pictures whose brilliant colours shine like bright enamels." The influence of *Gaspard de la Nuit* can be seen clearly in the later poems in the 1880 edition, those in the sections *Petits Coins* and *Natures-Mortes*, above all in the plastic nature of the description, and in the chiselled elegance of expression. Huysmans has added his own improvements to the form of the prose poem, however, "by using curious artifices, refrains in blank verse, beginning and ending the poem with a strange, rhythmical, repeated phrase, and giving it at times a kind of ritornello or final, separated envoy, as in the ballads of Villon and Deschamps". (Huysmans writing about himself in the series *Les Hommes d'Aujourd'hui*.) Four of the six poems contained in these two sections are composed in this way. *The Ballade en prose de la chandelle des six*, with its stanzas and its Envoy, each ending in the phrase "O chandelle des six, gresillante chandelle!"; the perpetual repetitions in *Ritournelle*; the first and last paragraphs of *Le poème en prose des viandes cuites au four* and *L'Image d'Épinal*, and the internal repetitions in the latter. The cry of the *Chestnut-man* had been used in this way in the earlier part of the book, and the same methods were to be used in one of the 1886 additions, *l'Obsession*.

But it is the last two pieces in the 1880 edition, grouped under the heading *Fleurs de Narines*, which show us the new Huysmans, the bizarre aesthete of *A Rebours*. *Les Similitudes* and *Le Gousset* are both extensions of Baudelaire's idea of the "correspondances" between smells, colours and sounds; but here we have an exaggeration and a decadence which enthrall and yet repel us.

True, in his descriptions of the *Folies* Huysmans had dwelt upon the smells, and even upon the human scents in this theatre; for him the "stink" of the ball at Grenelle is as important a factor as the sight of it. But in these cases the smell is an essential part of the description, and makes the scene rise up even more vividly before us. *Les Similitudes*, in its gradation and classification of scents and colours, is, on the contrary, a morbid foretaste of the chapter on scents (No. 10), the chapter on colours (No. 1), and the

"orgue à liqueurs" in *A Rebours*. *Le Gousset* takes us a stage further, with its calm discussion of the merits of the various smells from women's arm-pits.

Smell was to remain one of the most important features of Huysmans' powers of description, even as late as his book on *Ste. Lydwine, de Schiedam*, whose life he describes as "one of the odorous known to hagiographers". Some of his most powerful effects are obtained through this sense.

The exaggeration to be found in these two prose poems was later to be parodied by the American author Nathanael West, in his novel *The Dream Life of Balso Snell* (1931). One of the characters in this surrealist fantasy is writing a biography of *Samuel Perkins: Smeller*, a man whose nose dominated his other senses to such an extent that it was his only point of communication with the world :

"Perkins was able to translate the sensations, sound, sight, taste, and touch, into that of smell. He could smell a chord in D minor, or distinguish between the tone-smell of a violin and that of a viola. He could smell the caress of velvet and the strength of iron. It has been said of him that he could smell an isosceles triangle ; I mean that he could apprehend through the sense of smell the principles involved in isosceles triangles. . . .

. . . Perkins went, along the circumference of the circle of his senses, from anticipation to realization, from hunger to satiation, from naivete to sophistication, from simplicity to perversion. He went (speaking in Perkinsesque) from the smell of new-mown hay to that of musk and vervain (from the primitive to the romantic), and from vervain to sweat and excrement (from the romantic to the realistic) ; and, finally, to complete the circuit, from excrement he returned to new-mown hay. . . .

. . . He had found in the odors of a woman's body, never-ending, ever-fresh variation and change—a world of dreams, seas, forests, textures, colors, flavors, forms. On my questioning him further, he confirmed my interpretation. He told me that he had built from the odors of his wife's body an architecture and an aesthetic, a music and a mathematic. . . ."

\* \* \* \* \*

The smaller pieces added to the 1886 edition continue this trend towards decadence. *L'Ouverture de Tannhäuser* is the translation

of the music into visual terms, portraying a fantastic landscape amidst which the author depicts with delight the evil figure of the Christian Venus. *Damiens*, in which the author, on a brothel bed, sees himself in a mirror as the tortured assassin Damiens, is the first hint we get of the obsession with physical pain which is to mark the later novels, particularly *Sainte Lydwine de Schiedam* and *Les Foules de Lourdes*. *L'Étiage*, with its display of dressmakers' dummies, does for the female breast what *Le Gousset* had done for the arm-pit; and we are struck by the love Huysmans expresses for the ugly and the incomplete, as he shuns the perfect beauty of Greek statues. He loves what Praz would describe as "Medusean" beauty.

This fact is stressed by *Cauchemar*, in which we get a description of some of the pictures which have inspired the new Huysmans. Gone are the charm and clarity of Forain and Raffaëlli; instead, we find a gloomy, distorted nightmare formed by the genius of that "prince of mysterious dreams" Odilon Redon, whose works were to be found upon the walls of Des Esseintes.

"The true masters of this artist are Baudelaire and Edgar Poë," Huysmans writes of Redon, in the appendix to *L'Art Moderne*. The new Huysmans of *A Rebours* is in many ways the ultimate extension of these two authors on the literary plane.

\* \* \* \* \*

Huysmans once stated that all his later books were contained, in essence, in *A Rebours*; the same can be said, to a certain extent, of *Croquis Parisiens*, in that we get hints here and there of themes that will at some time in the author's life be important. Thus the *Poème en prose des viandes cuites au four* with its picture of the horrors of a bachelor's existence, eating in public restaurants, foreshadows the fate of M. Folantin, the civil servant of *A Vau-l'Eau*. *Le Gousset*, *Les Similitudes*, and other pieces look forward, as we have seen, to *A Rebours*. The Manichean view of the struggle of Good and Evil which is expressed in *L'Ouverture de Tannhäuser* might be taken as a prelude to *Là-Bas*. The prostitute and her man go to drink rigolboche in the Place Pinel, as the characters in *Les Soeurs Vatard* had done.

The Christian novels, the most important part of Huysmans' contribution to literature, are not to be traced in this work; but certain remarks point to the author's growing interest and fascination for Christianity, which was to make *A Rebours* so instrumental

in the conversion of Dom Willibrord Verkade. In the brothel of *Damiens* we find that "des rideaux de mousseline voilaient la croix des fenêtres", as if for Lent; in *L'Ouverture de Tannhäuser* Huysmans shows a definite sympathy for the medieval conception of grace, and a hatred of modern "singeries", just as he was to do after his conversion. The washer-women's career is likened to the "Road to the Cross", and "The Passion". And the remark which might seem the most superficial, the comparison, in *Le Coiffeur*, of the hairs under one's collar to the "eternal heroism of monks whose skins are scratched night and day by rough horse-hair shirts," is, when taken in conjunction with Huysmans' later ideas on Christian suffering, and his own death, strangely significant. Claudel, in a letter to André Suarès (June 30th, 1907), expressed his admiration at Huysmans' heroic death, and added:

"This is a man who used to write veritable lamentations over a spoiled egg or some hairs which the barber had dropped down inside his collar and who now suffers uncomplainingly the tortures of cancer of the mouth. I know what such things are like, for my grandfather died of one. Here are miracles greater than those of Lourdes. . . ."

\* \* \* \* \*

At a time of revived interest in Huysmans, it may seem strange to have chosen an early work, rather than one of the great Catholic novels which still remain inaccessible in translation. But, as I have already stated, the *Croquis Parisiens* are important, both in Huysmans' own development, and in the history of the prose poem, the *genre* of which Huysmans himself was to say:

"It is true that, even more than poetry perhaps, the poem in prose terrifies the Homais who make up the greater part of the public."

For my translation I can say little, except that it is an attempt to transpose Huysmans' extraordinary style into English, even though the ingredients—slang, neologisms, technical terms, rare words, intricate phrases, strange images—are so alien to normal English, as to normal French, expression. It is hard to follow on the steps of such excellent translations as those of Dr. Baldick, and I hope that readers will excuse my comparative insufficiency.

Selwyn College, Cambridge.  
November, 1960.

R.M.G.

## PARISIAN SKETCHES

### THE FOLIES-BERGÈRE

#### I

AFTER putting up with the shouts of programme-sellers and the offers of boot-blacks, you finally pass through the barrier where, standing amidst the seated gentlemen, a red-moustached young man with a wooden leg and a red ribbon in his button-hole takes your tickets, assisted by an usher with a chain; and then you suddenly see the stage of the theatre, cut off in the middle of the curtain by the massive ceiling formed by the balcony. You can see the bottom of the curtain, and in front of it the horse-shoe of the orchestra stalls, filled with heads, an uneven shifting field where, against the monotonous, gleaming background of the men's bald heads and glossy, pomaded hair, the women's hats stand out vividly, with their feathers and flowers sprouting in all directions.

A great hubbub is rising from the gathering crowd. A warm haze fills the hall, mingled with odours of every kind, and saturated with the acrid dust which comes from beaten carpets and chairs. The smell of cigars and women grows stronger; the gas lamps burn more dimly, reflected from one end of the theatre to the other end by the mirrors on the walls; it becomes almost impossible to wander around, or even, through the thick hedge of bodies, to see the acrobat on the stage, as he rhythmically performs gymnastic exercises on the horizontal bar.

For one moment, through the loop-hole formed by two shoulders and two heads, you catch a glimpse of him as, bent double, with his feet clamped to the bar, he rotates faster and faster, so furiously that he loses all human form, throwing out sparks as he goes, like a catherine-wheel fizzing around in a shower of gold; and then, little by little, the music which has been spinning around with him slows down, and gradually the acrobat's form reappears, with the pink of his tights standing out in contrast to the gold which, now that it is at rest, only glints here and there; and, back on his feet once more, the man waves to the public with both hands.



## II

*To Ludovic de Francmesnil.*

As you climb to the upper gallery of the hall, surrounded by women with rustling trains, weaving your way up a staircase on which a plaster statue, holding gas-lit torches in its hands, automatically reminds you of the entrance to a brothel, the music follows you, fainter at first, but then, after the turning on the staircase, louder and clearer than anywhere else. A blast of hot air strikes you in the face, and there, on the landing you can see the opposite view, the complement of what you have seen below; the curtain hanging from the top of the proscenium, and cut off in the middle by the edges of the red boxes, encircling like half-moons the balcony a few feet below them.

An *ouvreuse* in a white bonnet with pink ribbons offers you a programme which is a marvel both of spiritualist and positivist art: an Indian card-sharp, a lady calling herself a palmist and graphologist, a mesmerizer, clairvoyants, readers of tea-leaves; ocarinas and pianos for hire, maudlin music for sale, this is the soul's portion.—Advertisements for sweets, corsets and braces, a radical cure for secret ailments, and a very special treatment for mouth diseases, this is the body's part.—One thing, however, is slightly disconcerting: an advertisement for sewing-machines. Even the advertisement for a fencing school is understandable enough, for such fools do exist! But the *Singer* and the *Silent Wonder* are not implements normally used by girls who work in this place; unless the advertisement was placed there as a symbol of decency, as an inducement to chaste toil. It is perhaps, in another form, the equivalent of the moral pamphlets distributed by the English to bring corrupt creatures back to virtue.

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Imagination is certainly a wonderful thing; it allows one to credit people with ideas even more foolish than those which they doubtless had.

## III

*To Léon Hennique.*

They are outrageous and they are splendid, as they walk two by two in the hemicycle adjoining the hall, powdered and painted, with their eyes drowned in a sea of pale blue, their lips covered with startling red lipstick, and their breasts jutting out above their tightly laced bellies; as they pass, they emit whiffs of opopanax, which they lessen by fanning themselves, and which mingle with the powerful aroma of their arm-pits and the subtle perfume of the flowers expiring on their bodices.

Entranced, you watch this flock of girls as they rhythmically pass by, against a dull red background broken up by mirrors, and as they slowly turn, like the wooden horses which run around, to the sound of an organ, against a bit of scarlet curtain decorated with mirrors and lamps; you watch their thighs moving under their dresses, and the swirls of foam formed by their white petticoats as they work their way below the hem of the material. You whinny, as you follow the trail of these women as they slip between the chests of men coming in the opposite direction, who open and close their ranks for them, letting you occasionally catch a glimpse, through the chinks between heads, of the back view of their *chignons*, lit up on each side by the golden gleam of a piece of jewellery, or the flash of a precious stone.

But then you tire of this incessant beat, continually trodden by the same women, and you prick up your ears at a murmur coming from the hall, greeting the entrance of the conductor, a tall thin man well known for his polkas of the *barrières* and his waltzes. A salvo of applause comes from the upper and lower promenades and from the boxes, where suspicious glimpses of women's white flesh can be caught in the semi-darkness; the maestro bows, and then raises his head, with its brush-like hair, its pepper-and-salt chinese moustache, and its bespectacled nose; with his back to the stage, dressed in white tie and tails, he begins to conduct, quietly stirring the music in a bored and sleepy manner; but then suddenly, turning towards the brass, he holds out his baton like a fishing-line, fishes out the blast of the *reprise*, extracts the notes sharply, like teeth, beats the air violently up and down, and finally pumps out the melody as thought on a beer-machine.

## IV

*To Paul Daniel.*

The piece of music has finished, and a silence follows, broken suddenly by the stroke of a gong. The curtain rises, and yet the stage remains empty; but meanwhile men dressed in grey overalls with red collars and cuffs are running about all over the hall, pulling ropes, undoing clamps, and adjusting knots. The hubbub resumes, and two or three men move around on the stage, with a better-dressed man looking on. They are getting ready to spread an immense net over the middle of the stage, and above the orchestra stalls. The net sways, and then leaves the ledge of the balcony, where it was rolled up; running along on its copper rings, it rattles like the sea playing with pebbles.

Cheers resound throughout the hall. The orchestra grinds out a circus waltz; a man and woman come in, dressed in flesh-coloured tights, with Japanese-style gorgets and trunks of indigo and turquoise, decorated with fringes and silver spangles; the woman is English, with an over-painted face, yellow hair, and copious buttocks jutting out above sturdy legs, while the man is comparatively slender with well-groomed hair and a curly moustache. The set smile of barbers' dummies hovers on their clean-cut, Herculean faces. The man leaps at a rope, and hoists himself up to the trapeze hanging in front of the curtain, near the ceiling, amidst ropes and crossbars, between the chandeliers; then, sitting on the bar, which squeezes the flesh on his thighs, he quickly does some conjuring tricks, now and then wiping his hands on a handkerchief tied to one of the ropes.

Next, the woman climbs up to the net, which sags under her weight, and crosses it from one side to the other, bouncing back at each step as though on a spring-board, with her yellow plaits dancing around on the nape of her neck; then, after climbing on to a little platform hanging above the balcony, directly opposite the man but separated from him by the entire breadth of the hall, she stands waiting, with all eyes fixed upon her.

The two streams of electric light directed on to her from the back of the *Folies* completely cover her from behind, breaking off at the bend of her hips, splashing her from head to toe, painting



her, so to speak, with an outline of silver gouache ; from there they go on separately through the chandeliers, almost invisible in their flight, and then join again, spreading over the man on the trapeze in a splash of bluish light, illuminating the fringes on his trunks with sparkling bits of mica like grains of sugar.

The waltz continues more slowly, with gentler hammock-like undulations and almost imperceptible rocking movements, accompanying the soft rhythm of the trapeze and the man's double shadow projected on to the top of the curtain by the two rays of electric light.

Leaning forward a little, the woman too is grasping a trapeze in one hand, and holding herself back on a rope with the other. Meanwhile, the man topples down and, suspended by his feet from the bar of his trapeze, remains motionless, with his head downwards and his arms stretched out.

Then the waltz suddenly stops. A deathly silence begins, broken suddenly by the detonation from a bottle of champagne. A shiver runs through the audience, an "all right" rings across the hall ; and then the woman, hurling herself through the air seemingly at random, slips through the light of the chandeliers, and, leaving go of the trapeze, falls feet forwards into the arms of the man, who, at the shattering crash of a cymbal, and to the triumphant, joyful accompaniment of the returning waltz, swings her for a moment by her feet, and then throws her into the net, where she bounces in her blue and silver tights like a fish slithering and jumping around in a fishing-net.

Stampings, clappings, and sticks banging on the floor accompany the acrobats' descent. When they disappear into the wings the shouts become even more tumultuous, and the man and woman reappear, one bowing very low, the other lavishly blowing kisses ; then, with a childlike leap, they retire once more into the wings.

The net, as it is put back, fills the hall once more with the sound of rolling waves.

\* \* \* \* \*

And I think of Antwerp, the great port where, to the accompaniment of a similar rolling noise one hears the "all right" of the English sailors as they prepare to put to sea. It is in this way, however, that the most disparate places and things meet in an analogy which may at first seem strange. One evokes in the place where one is the pleasures of the place where one is not. In this

upside-down way one kills two birds with one stone. The short pleasure inspired by the present is diverted at the moment when it would tire and die, and renewed and prolonged in another pleasure which, seen through the eyes of memory, becomes both more real and more sweet.

## V

The ballet begins. The scene represents a vague harem interior, full of veiled women lounging about like she-bears. A fancy-dress Ottoman, with a turban on his head and a chibouk in his mouth, cracks his whip and the veils fall, revealing almahs recruited from the depths of the suburbs, skipping around to music worthy of a Saturday-night hop, enlivened from time to time by the tune "Old Bugeaud's Cap", which has no doubt been introduced into the mazurka to justify the arrival of a batch of women dressed as spahis.

For a moment, under the streams of electric light inundating the stage, a whirlwind of white tulle appears, spattered with points of blue light, and, in the centre of it, a writhing circle of naked flesh; and then the *première danseuse*, recognizable by her silk costume, becomes visible, and dances on her toes for a while, shaking the false sequins which surround her like a circle of golden dots; then she leaps in the air, and sinks back into her skirts, imitating a fallen flower with its petals on the ground and its stalk in the air.

But all this bank-holiday Orient, bursting upon one with the crash of a grand finale, has been unable to divert the connoisseur's attention from the fact that amidst all these gawky women, as they rhythmically throw themselves around, only one has been really interesting, the one dressed as a spahi officer, in wide baggy blue trousers, dainty little red boots, a gold-braided spencer, and a skin-tight little scarlet waistcoat clinging to her breasts, outlining her firm nipples. She danced like a goat, but she was adorable and vile, with her braided *képi*, her wasp waist, her fat buttocks, her snub nose, and her pleasantly vulgar, impudent appearance. Such as she was, this girl called to mind barricades and unpaved streets, gave out a smell of proof spirit and powder, and conjured up popular epics, and the ardours of civil war, mitigated by riotous debauches.

Inevitably, on seeing her, one thought of those feverish eras, of those insurrections in which Marianne of Belleville, released from all constraint, rushes to deliver her country or to stave in a cask.

## VI

In the background, a cemetery; on the right a tombstone with this inscription on it: Here lies . . . killed in a duel—Night; some muted music; nobody.

Suddenly, from the wings on both sides, two clowns dressed in black coats slowly advance, followed by their seconds: one of them, tall and thin, recalling to mind the type created by Deburau, has a long horse-face covered with flour, and blinking, white-lidded eyes; the other is plumper and more stocky, with a short, mocking nose, and a mouth which splits his pale mask like a red hole.

The impression created by the entrance of these men is strong and spine-chilling. The comedy drawn from the contrast between their black bodies and white faces disappears, the sordid theatrical chimera no longer exists. Life itself rises before us, passionate and proud.

The clowns read the inscription on the tomb, and recoil in horror; trembling, they turn their heads away, only to see a doctor unrolling bandages and calmly preparing his medical kit.

Distorted anguish crosses their pallid faces; fear, that terrible neurosis, roots them, wavering, to the spot.

Placed facing each other, they become even more frightened at the sight of the swords being brought out from the cloths. Their hands tremble even more, their knees quake, their throats choke, their mouths work, their tongues flap dryly, seeking for breath, and their fingers wander around, clutching at the ties they are meant to be undoing.

Then their terror becomes even greater, so imperious and atrocious that their already rebellious nerves suddenly get out of hand, and they become so distraught that no-one can stop them. One fixed idea comes into these men's confused minds, that of taking flight, and they dash away, knocking everything over; but they are followed and brought back by their seconds, who put them back face to face, with their swords in their hands.

Then, after one last revolt of the flesh, which rebels against the slaughter expected of it, they are filled with the energy of animals at bay and throw themselves dementedly at each other, striking and stabbing at random, making incredible leaps, unconscious, blinded and deafened by the glittering, clashing steel; and then they suddenly fall down exhausted, like mechanical toys with broken springs.

Finishing on a note of extreme slapstick, of disorganised burlesque, this cruel study of the human machine at grips with fear has made the audience split their sides with guffaws. From a close examination of this laughter, my opinion would be that the public saw this admirable pantomime purely as an exhibition of freaks, intended, no doubt, to complete the fairground appearance taken on by the *Folies Bergère* in the corners filled with whirligigs and skittle-alleys, bearded women and shooting-galleries.

But for more reflective, more active minds, it is a completely different matter. The whole aesthetic of the English school of caricature is once more called into play by the performances of those side-splitting yet dismal acrobats, the Hanlon-Lees. Their pantomime, so true in its cold foolishness, so ferociously funny in its exaggeration, is none other than a new and charming incarnation of the lugubrious type of farce, the sinister kind of buffoonery so peculiar to the land of spleen, which has already been expressed and condensed by those magnificent, powerful artists Hogarth and Rowlandson, Gillray and Cruikshank.

## VII

For the *Folies* there are two kinds of waltz which are both necessary and delightful; one of them is joyful and pirouetting, expressing the swing of the trapezes, the amazing somersaults of the clowns, and the rhythm of a body raising and lowering itself by the strength of its own arms, rocking, supported only by its legs, and then climbing up again, with its head creeping up past its belly, and its hands taking the place of its feet and letting them beat the air once more with their chalk-rubbed shoes; the other is unhealthily voluptuous, as it portrays the bloodshot eyes and trembling hands of interrupted acts of depravity, joys stopped by the presence of a third person, lechery miscarrying in full spate

through lack of staying power, and bodies contracted and waiting, and finally ending, amid the triumphant din of cymbals and brass, on the painful yet joyous cry of the climax.

It would be meaningless, for example, to play music from "Robert le Diable" in this hall. It would jar like a noble, fatherly face at an intimate tête-a-tête dinner party. Here they need rotten, vulgar music, something which will envelope the people in common caresses, in the kisses of the street, in twenty-franc fornication; this band of people who have dined copiously and well, who are worn out from handling murky affairs, and who drag into this periphery their worry at rotten tricks which may turn out badly for them; people made uneasy by their shady deals in shares or women, or made merry by the joys of pirates who, successful in their ventures, get drunk with painted women to the sound of crapulous music.

## VIII

The thing that is really admirable, and really unique, about this theatre is the hall-mark of the boulevards which is stamped upon it.

It is ugly, and it is magnificent; it is in a taste that is both outrageous and exquisite; it is incomplete, like all things truly beautiful. The garden, with its upper galleries, its rough wooden lace-work arcades, its full lozenges and hollow trefoils painted in gold and red ochre, its ceiling of garnet-red and greyish-brown striped cloth, its imitation Louvois fountains, with three women back to back between two enormous imitation-bronze saucers set amidst clumps of greenery, and its avenues, lined with tables, chairs, rushwork divans and bars kept by amply made-up women, resembles the Bouillon Duval in the Rue Montesquieu, and at the same time an Algerian or Turkish bazaar.

Alhambresque à la Poret, Moresque à la Duval, with moreover a vague atmosphere of the saloon bars in the former suburbs, with their oriental colonnades and mirrors, this theatre, with its auditorium whose faded red and tarnished gold clash so strongly with the brand-new luxury of the imitation garden, is the only place in Paris which stinks so deliciously of the cosmetics of paid caresses and the desperation of weary depravity.



## THE BALL AT THE BRASSERIE EUROPÉENNE IN GRENELLE

I SAT down at a café table, near two ladies who were deep in conversation. One of them, a jolly, red-faced woman with clear eyes and grey hair, was crumpling in her hand the knot of her carob-brown scarf; the other, whose features were yellowish and slightly drawn, was persistently taking snuff from a horn snuff-box.

Every time they spoke, these ladies called each other by their names; the red-faced one called her neighbour Madame Haumont, her own name being Madame Tampoïs.

From where I was sitting, on a little platform led up to by two steps, I had a view over the entire ball.

A little above me, to the right, rose the tiers of the orchestra; to my left, overhanging a little lake of stagnant water, there bristled the *rocaille* of an imitation grotto in which three pink plaster statues in chipped pepla were standing against a wall depicting a Swiss valley. The ball at the Brasserie Européenne was divided into two parts by a balustrade: one of them was in the form of a wide corridor supported by cast-iron pillars, floored with asphalt, furnished with tables and chairs, and roofed with cloth that had once been green, but which had by now become rotted by the gaslight and seeping water; the other stretched out like a vast covered market, similarly supported by pillars, and covered by a ridged glass roof. One might have thought that this hall, with its cracked, discoloured walls, belonged to a little railway station, and the similarity was accentuated by dim lighting similar to that in waiting-rooms, by the three red and green lights blazing in the smoke at the back of the hall like signal lights, and by an immense glass partition separating the ball from the beer-saloon, a partition which, as it shook amidst a cloud of smoke in the flickering gaslight, gave the uncertain impression of a badly-lit railway line running into the distance through the night mist.

On this suburban platform an enormous crowd was milling around, and, to the strident shrilling of the flutes and the insistent rumbling of the big drum, quartermasters, administrative clerks, medical orderlies, staff and recruiting secretaries, a whole army of

white-bullioned epaulettes, were bobbing around, throwing their blue arms to the ceiling, and their red legs to the floor; some, bare-headed, with close-cropped, sweating skulls, were making scissors-movements with their legs; others, with their *képis* squashed down on the nape of their necks, were swaying their hips, holding the tails of their coats with two fingers, like dancing-girls holding their skirts; and others, with their hands on their bellies, seemed to be grinding coffee or turning a crank-handle; meanwhile, performing the *cavalier seul*, a medical orderly was jumping around, with his shin-bones twisting like cuff-links, and his writhing arms and clenched fists apparently trying to uncork the dance-floor like a bottle.

The women were, for the most part, calmer and less energetic. They almost all moved around in a fairly decorous manner, making affected gestures, seeming to have put on, with their party dresses, a kind of Sunday-best distinction which was maintained by the presence of their relations sitting on wooden benches against the wall.

Some of them, well-dressed, and adorned with pretentious jewels, had preserved some of the former elegance of the tobacco-girls of Gros-Caillou, to whose number they belonged; they displayed long gloves with eight buttons, bought at the dry-cleaner's for fifteen sous, and two of them, tightly squeezed into dark black dresses of Indian cachemere, with jet necklaces around their necks, were lounging shrewishly along on the arms of two butchers from the Grenelle abattoir, strapping fellows with complexions like raw meat, and with gaudy scarves tied in sailor-knots over their long-sleeved knitted waistcoats.

These men displayed neither the smart gestures, nor the vain attitudes of the military. More common, yet less vulgar, as they danced they lifted their copious bellies, puffed out their cheeks, pretending to be out of breath, and, like coachmen in cold weather, jumped clumsily in the air with their feet together, beating their arms across their shoulders.

"Hullo! There's Ninie! Hi! Ninie!"

The cry could be heard even above the blasts of the orchestra; a hole suddenly gaped in the middle of a group of infantrymen, and out of it there shot a plump little girl, who hurled herself right into the middle of the quadrille and, with her skirt up to her belly, started kicking up her legs, revealing, beneath the fine white calico of her drawers, the naked flesh of her thighs.

"Hi there, Titine," she shouted to her opposite number, a sixteen-year-old brat with a snub nose and a prominent mouth with short, rather uneven teeth which looked as though they had been filed down. This girl, amidst a circle of dancers, kept kicking into the air a thin leg made even thinner by the bright red colour of her lisle stockings.

"She really lets herself go disgustingly when she dances," said Mme. Tampoïs, pointing at Ninie, who, with her hands on her hips like a fishwife, and her bust swaying around, was rolling her eyes blankly at the ceiling, and rapidly sticking out the pointed tip of her tongue and then drawing it back in.

"And just look at that brat with the stockings," replied Mme. Haumont, folding her hands. "Would you believe it, at that age? No, really, two such monstrosities are enough to keep respectable people from bringing their daughters to the ball!"

The two old ladies swallowed another gulp of beer, and then tried once more to balance the pile of coats and hats on a nearby chair.

"I say, what a crowd!"

"Don't talk about it . . . it's stifling!"

"How's business going, Mme. Tampoïs?"

"So so, Mme. Haumont. In the haberdashery business, you know, you don't make pots of money."

"What the devil has happened to Léonie," sighed Mme. Haumont. "Can you see her?" But Mme. Tampoïs signalled to her that she could not hear what she was saying. The quadrille was nearing its end, and, as though demented, the clarinets were blowing hard enough to shatter themselves into splinters, the brass were violently lashing the hall with a hail of noise, and the big drum was booming amidst the clashing of broken glass from the furiously shaking cymbals.

At last the musicians stopped, exhausted; some mopped their brows and their necks, while others, panting, emptied out the saliva from their trombones; yellow, and stained with black, like great pancakes, the cymbals lay at rest along with the drumstick, on top of the big drum.

"Here they are, and none too soon!" said Mme. Haumont as she caught sight of her daughter wending her way towards her on the arm of a staff-sergeant. "Come on, wrap yourself up well," she said, throwing a cloak over her shoulders. "Here, drink a little of this," and she offered her a glass of lukewarm wine she



had ordered during the dance. But her daughter protested that she was thirsty, and wanted to drink something cool.

"When you are bathed in perspiration, you should drink something hot," said her mother, mopping her daughter's brow and putting the glass to her lips at the same time.

"What about you, Jules," asked Mme. Tampoïs. "Do you feel like drinking this beer?"

"Well, Aunt," replied the sergeant, "I won't say no, for it's fantastically hot." He clicked his tongue against his teeth. "Really, it does you good wherever it goes," he went on, wiping his moustache. "Hullo, there's Cabannes. Hi, over here, old man! How are you?"

"Getting along nicely," articulated the nasal voice of Cabannes, a medical orderly sergeant with a freckled face and carrotty hair; he bowed politely to the ladies and then, after a moment of silence added:

"A thirsty place, here."

No-one seemed to take any notice of the newcomer's remark.

"Any orders?" shouted the waiter running up.

No-one uttered a word.

"No," Mme. Tampoïs finally said.

"All the quicker served," said Cabannes gloomily, with a touch of bitterness. "A Daniel come to judgment," the good lady calmly replied, taking out her snuff-box and offering it to Mme. Haumont, and then putting a pinch on the palm of her hand and sniffing it deeply and wheezily up her nose.

And now a polka was starting, shaking the window-panes as though at the passing of a lorry loaded with shale. Jules gave his arm to Léonie, Cabannes took one look around the table at the two old women, and then pivoted on his heels without bowing, and plunged into the current of the ball.

"It's impossible to hear oneself think, above this confounded music of theirs," groaned Mme. Tampoïs. Explosions from the brass were bursting in her ears; she turned round and glared furiously at an old trombonist with a bespectacled bottle-nose and distended cheeks as inflamed as a monkey's bare backside, who was pushing brass pipes into his stomach and then pulling them out again with a tremendous noise.

"It's absolutely impossible! What do you think, my dear?" But her friend was no longer listening to her; her eyes were following her daughter, in the distance, through the crowd; she could

only see her from behind, for her face was pressed to the sergeant's ; red trousers and white epaulettes, and then a black dress and white petticoats, appeared and disappeared alternately as they whirled around. Soon she completely lost sight of Léonie ; reddish dust was rising from the floor and mingling with the steam which hung under the roof as though in a bath-house. Below her, here and there in the swarming crowd, the everlasting red breeches were galloping around, with the tails of blue-black tunics jumping around above them, speckled gold and silver by their buttons ; on all sides, near people's faces, the bullions of the epaulettes were crawling about like maggots.

The hall seemed to be shaking ; the signal lights were slowly flickering in the fog ; the silhouettes of soldiers and girls were moving around in a confused manner, as though in hot turbid water.

Drops began to fall from the ceiling, where the steam was condensing ; Mme. Haumont stuck her nose in the air.

" Can you understand them leaving a roof ? Ah, Theresa, how are you ? " She interrupted her remarks, and shook hands with a tall, beautiful girl who was coming up the steps, followed by a cuirassier.

A faded beauty, but nevertheless good-looking beneath her coating of pink make-up and her comb-tooth fringe, Theresa was parading like a peacock in a hooped soot-black dress of pekin striped with satin and faille, under which there shimmered a petticoat of puffed blue satin trimmed with cream lace. One caught a glimpse of peacock-blue stockings and bronze ankle-boots as she leaned backwards a little to take off an immense red plush d'Artagnan hat, pinned down by a grey dove on the left-hand side.

" Is everything still going as well as you would like ? " she asked, sitting down and revealing fingers covered with rings and equipped with scoop-shaped nails painted with artificial pink.

" You," she said curtly to the cuirassier, " What do you want, wine or beer ? "

" Wine ! "

" Waiter, a bottle of wine ! " Then, without taking any more notice of the cuirassier she continued :

" And how is Léonie ? And her cough ? "

" Hardly any difference ; it's no use telling oneself it's nothing, one worries all the same ; and besides, she's not at all sensible about

it, she's too fond of dancing. . . . At any rate, you'll soon see her, she's here."

Theresa glanced sideways at the enormous soldier silently drinking beside her, at his heavy bull-neck, his close-cropped skull, his low forehead and his thick yellow moustache. She seemed to be weighing with a glance the might of his shoulders, the strength of his back and loins, and the things promised by his wild and brutal air; then she got up and, fixing her gaze on the promenade along the edge of the ball, seemed to be gauging the breadth of shoulder and the bestial appearance of the other cuirassiers filling the tables there; she smiled with satisfaction, fell back into her chair, and ordered another bottle.

"Theresa," said Mme. Haumont, gently pulling her sleeve. "There's Léonie."

"That woman really is worthless," muttered Mme. Tampoïs. "She doesn't even know that soldier. . . ."

But Mme. Haumont replied stiffly:

"She's the daughter of Old Gillet, you know, the man who lived on the same floor as us for a long time, the mechanic from Cail's. Theresa may enjoy herself, that's her own affair, but mark my words, the woman has no equal for decency; she would never do anyone the least harm. And besides, she lives in absolute luxury, you know; if only you could see it. Furthermore, she's being kept by quite an important gentleman . . ." and she added, confidentially: "One of the nobility, my dear."

"You don't say so," said Mme. Tampoïs, looking at Theresa with respect. "She's certainly got what one might call a distinguished face," she added, loudly enough to be overheard. Theresa smiled, and, encouraged by this, Mme. Tampoïs was about to join in the conversation between Theresa and Léonie, who were chattering nineteen to the dozen, when she saw her nephew the sergeant signalling to attract her attention. Below her, in the ballroom, he was looking up questioningly, and imitating someone emptying a glass.

"No, no," said the old lady. "You can do without boozing for once; did you ever see such a thing!"

Jules did not insist; he turned sharply, and went to rejoin a group of his comrades who were walking about, during the intermissions, in the space reserved for dancing. They were strutting around with their hands in their pockets, leaning backwards and shouting with laughter, obstructing women, having frantic races

with tobacco-girls and young washerwomen, chasing each other around like little urchins, uttering loud shouts as they dustily careered round, and clouting each other now and then for amusement's sake. Scattered among the soldiery, the despised civilians remained comparatively calm: apart from some pimps who had slipped out from the Salon de Mars or the Bouge de l'Ardoise, some draper's assistants, and some precision workers dressed, like them, in suits, but recognizable by their black fingers and worn nails; apart from some Grenelle butchers, tobacco workers, and Ministry employes (mostly belonging to the War Department), the hall was dominated by the troops of the Commissariat, as they twirled the points of their moustaches, struck elegant poses, and eyed the spectators with a resolute air, as befitted the absolute masters of a conquered country, adored by all the young females of Gros-Caillou and Grenelle.

But, in contrast to the gay, noisy party of infantrymen in the glass-covered station in front of the orchestra, another more sombre, silent group had taken up its position in the cloth-roofed promenade. Detachments of dragoons, artillerymen and transport-riders, and whole squadrons of cuirassiers were sitting there drinking. Their heavy uniforms, and the impossibility, at the height of the ball, of dancing even with covered spurs, prevented them from joining in the polkas and quadrilles. Moreover, they looked on the infantry and the tobacco-girls with disdain, despising these foot-sloggers and these little girls who were so unappreciative of their great physique; they were awaiting women richer both in money and in knowledge of vice, who would be coming over from the other side of the river about midnight, in order to enjoy once more the crapulous delights of their native district.

"I'm going to dance," cried Theresa, rising from her seat. "You've still got some wine, drink up," she went on, speaking to the quietly smoking cuirassier, and then, leaping off the dais, plunged into the crowd of infantrymen.

"Ah! What a meeting!" she said, stopping in front of a man dressed in a nut-brown overcoat, dirty tweed trousers, down-at-heel patent-leather boots, and a red scarf tied around his greasy collar, hiding his shirt. But her voice was drowned by the uproar. "A quadrille! A quadrille!" was the cry heard throughout the hall.

"Stay here, my dear," Mme. Haumont said to Léonie. "You're tired, and it's very late."

"Oh! Just one figure," she said, as she saw Jules coming towards

her; and she disappeared into the smoke in the wake of the sergeant.

"It's almost midnight," sighed her mother, annoyed. "To-day is Sunday, so it's a late night ball. I would have liked to leave before they all arrive from the brothels. Look, Mme. Tampoïs, just as I was saying it, here they are!"

And sure enough, a confused mass of hats and skirts was gushing noisily through the wide-open doors; beneath extravagant-brimmed hats and masses of plumes and feathers, circles of pink face-powder split by gaping, scarlet-edged holes were throwing themselves backwards and emitting loud yells. They were met by frantic cheers, and immediately there came the sound of boots heavily rumbling across the floor. The squadrons of cavalry got under way, and charged towards the girls with their arms out. And then there was a confused mass of tunics and dresses, a jumble of red, black and white, a swirl of bodies amidst which the cuirassiers' shaven necks could be seen rising above the plumes and feathers, with naked arms entwined around them. The corridor into which the cavalry were crowding disappeared in a cloud of dust, and from it came a rumbling like a boiler being stoked; and then the shaking of the hall came to an end, drowned by the hurricane of a quadrille.

"What a lot of smoke, it's impossible to see one another!" said Mme. Tampoïs. "Tomorrow my handkerchief will be black."

"And what a row!" said Mme. Haumont, stopping her ears.

Taking no notice of the cavalry charges, the regiments of the Commissariat attacked in their turn, carrying off tobacco-girls by their waists. Over on one side, Ninie was trying to pin up a gaping split in her drawers; large drops of sweat were gathering under her armpits and running down to her breasts. The violent odour of horse-dung and rancid grease coming from the clothes of the cavorting cavalry now became mingled with the pestilential aroma of hot boots and shoes, and the fetid scent of slovenly armpits and cheap cosmetics.

"The little minx," sighed Mme. Haumont, looking everywhere for her daughter. "Ah! You've finally made up your mind, and none too soon. Come on, since you've come at last, let's hurry; it's getting late." As the women put on their coats, the little sergeant embraced his aunt, and briskly shook hands with everyone else in turn; then the women came down from the dais and tried to slip through the cuirassiers' camp; but after a couple of steps they



had to stop. "Let's go back to the dance-hall," suggested Mme. Tampoïs. "Léonie, follow me, and hold on to the rail." She went along the balustrade dividing the hall, but their retreat was cut off on that side too; they could go neither forwards nor backwards. A gap suddenly appeared, and Mme. Tampoïs rushed into it; Mme. Haumont and her daughter dashed after her, but were abruptly stopped by knocking their noses on her back; her body completely blocked the narrow space she had entered; Mme. Tampoïs was stuck fast, as though two doors had closed on her. She pressed furiously with all her weight upon those around her, and managed to elbow a way through the middle of a group, dragging Léonie and her mother after her, with me following as a kind of rear-guard; and, amidst the cries of women being jostled out of the way, the curses of waiters as their trays of beer swayed around above their heads, and the cannibal cries uttered by the troops, they finally managed to reach the door of the saloon.

"Do your cloak up properly, my girl," said her mother; but the café was overflowing with soldiers, and none of the exits were free.

The cavalry and the infantry were drinking all jumbled up together, in here; the two currents, which had been so distinct from each other in the dance-hall, were all mixed together in an immense hall filled with benches and billiard-tables. Piles of saucers and glasses were mounting up on the tables. All around the walls there were coatstands and hat-pegs, glittering with trophies; the purple-plumed or black-maned helmets of the cuirassiers, the vermilion-tailed helmets of the trumpeters, shakos with cockades and copper stars, madder-red *képis*, cartridge-pouches, sword-bayonets, and long cavalry swords with shining brass hilts and steel scabbards, were hung up on all sides, above the seats; and as they were struck by the draught as the doors opened, the weapons rustled, the manes quivered, and long undulations brushed along the plumed crests.

A continuous hubbub rose amid the steam from the onion soup and sauerkraut; from time to time the jerky shrilling of the flutes reached the café, accompanied by the distant rumbling of the bass drum.

"Why, it's Léonie!"

The three women turned round; in an alcove behind them, a young girl dressed entirely in black velvet, relieved only by twin dots of fire in the lobes of her ears, was sitting opposite a medical orderly.



"Good heavens! It's Louise," cried Léonie, kissing her on both cheeks.

"How are you, Mme. Tampoïs?"

"Very well."

"Have you just left the ball?"

"Yes."

"How nice to see you, Mme. Haumont. Look, there's plenty of room, come and sit down."

"Steady on! That's enough of these ugly mugs," muttered the orderly.

"Look here, you; try to have some manners, at least," said Mme. Tampoïs.

"Shut up, Casimir," Louise ordered.

"No, my dear, it's too late. We're off to bed," said Mme. Haumont, refusing the proffered chair.

But the young girl insisted. "Léonie will catch cold, standing up in a draught like that, right between the doors. Come now, Mme. Haumont, sit down and have a drink."

"Very well," said the old lady. "But Léonie will drink something good for her, like mulled wine."

"Oh, no!" cried Léonie. "I'm fed up with your mulled wine, I want some beer." This started a furious argument.

"Why shouldn't the young lady drink both?" suggested the orderly.

With a withering look Mme. Haumont taught him not to meddle in her affairs. "A beer!" shouted Léonie, as the waiter passed by.

Mme. Haumont shook her head. "These young people," she sighed. Then she turned to Louise.

"Well, Louise, what's new in the tobacco business?"

"Always the same, Mme. Haumont. Nothing new under the sun. We work from morning till night, and hardly earn a thing."

"The fact is," replied the old lady, inspecting the young girl's dress, "The fact is that if it was government money that had to pay for velvet like that . . ." She enviously felt the material between her finger and thumb.

"You're saying it!" said Louise laughing. "Well, I'd certainly have had to roll a lot of cigarettes!"

"Oh, by the way, how's Berthe?"

"So so."

"Is she still making cigarettes by hand?"

"No, didn't you know? She's on the cigarette machines now."

"You don't say!—Oh, by the way, did you know that Theresa was at the ball?"

"Hullo, there's that man again," interrupted Mme. Tampois, pointing at Cabannes as he prowled around the tables. "Go on, you loafer! If thou be hungry, eat thy fist, if thou be thirsty . . ."

She could not remember the rest of the phrase. "My friends," she went on, changing the subject, and taking a pinch of snuff, "It's absolutely stifling here."

"That's true," said Louise out of the corner of her mouth. She was fascinated by the ostentatious clothes of two hollow-eyed girls with blackened eyelashes fluttering above the patches of rouge plastered on their cheeks; they were dressed in elegant but shabby dresses, fastened with pins and bits of ribbon; obviously they were two tarts from the houses on the other side of the river. They were creating the most incredible row, completely on their own; they had asked for a bottle of beer, and the waiter, bewildered by all the different orders, had left the bottle in front of them without remembering to open it. So they were shouting for him until they were blue in the face, while from the distance he kept yelling "Yes!" but continued to carry trays of beer to the other end of the room.

"What a c . . .!" said one of them; she grasped the neck of the bottle firmly, and tried to remove the cork with her teeth; but it was useless, however much she contorted her features under their thick coating of powder.

"Nothing doing," she said, wiping a handkerchief across her discoloured lips and putting the bottle down again, with the top of its cork tinged with pink.

By this time all the tables were covered with food and drink, and all the chairs filled with soldiers and women.

On one side of them, a girl, sprawling across a dragoon's knees in a half-swoon, was clasping his legs between her thighs and rubbing her thin stockings against his thigh-boots; on the other side, another girl's fingers were being crushed in the vast paw of a cuirassier, and as he squashed her rings together she was weeping, and almost fainting with pain and desire. Two rows of tables further on, a tall woman with a marvellous plum-coloured satin scarf over her head, topped with a large cluster of yellow plumes, was calmly eating onion soup next to a sot of an artilleryman whose saliva was dribbling down in threads between his knees; she was holding her spoon up very high, in order to catch the strands of

cheese, and then she was noisily sucking them in.—Alone and probably forsaken, a young girl sat staring blankly in front of her, pensively chewing matchsticks.

A ball, clumsily struck by a medical orderly, leaped off one of the billiard tables and rolled under a bench; the room resounded with the squeaking of moving chairs, the clatter of feet, and the absurd exclamations of the women. A soldier who had been sick, and had now been brought round by his comrades, was slouching back on one of the benches with a drawn face, stinking of sour wine and ammonia; a drunken girl had fallen asleep in front of her plate of sauerkraut, which one of the quartermasters was pilfering bit by bit.

Soon, amidst the drunkenness of this festive parade-ground, the arguments began. The passions caused by *esprit de corps*, the mutual hatreds of different branches of the service, the instinct for quarrelling, the desire for brutality, the inspiration to battle, were all becoming aroused; disputes arose, first at one table, and then spreading to all the others. Already they could see a cuirassier standing, held back by the arms of his more sober friends, and insulting another soldier who was sitting somewhere out of sight; meanwhile, behind one of the billiard-tables, the pimps of Grenelle were threatening, in drawling voices, to knife each other once they left the ball.

“It’s becoming very disreputable, let’s go while the going’s good,” ordered Mme. Haumont.

It was certainly becoming disreputable, and I had breathed in enough military infection and carnal sweat to cause a violent desire for stimulating gusts of pure, silent air. I followed the example of these good ladies, whose words and deeds I had been so carefully observing, and left the building.

Out on the Avenue de Lowendal, in the middle of the night, alone in that silent district, I started to tabulate the ideas I had gathered; it seemed possible to combine them all, and blend them into this axiom: in Gros Caillou and Grenelle, love begins, for very young girls, with staff secretaries and quartermasters, and ends, for mature women, with powerful cuirassiers and men of the field-train.

And then, very often, in the hope of having their absinthes paid for by the former earnings of these old bodies, retired captains, of all the services, take up these imitation Magdalens and marry them, when their maturity has become such that, despite the certainty of the reward, the heavy cavalry takes fright.

## PARISIAN TYPES

### THE BUS CONDUCTOR

“STOP, stop!”

—Ting!

“Whew!”—and, with her skirts tucked up and her face as red as a peony, the fat old woman stumbles into the vehicle, helped by the conductor’s arm, and finally runs aground, amid smothered gasps, between the little mahogany rails on either side of her seat.

The conductor rummages in his satchel, and gives the enormous, overflowing lump of a woman her change; then he climbs onto the roof of the omnibus, where the passengers, crammed together on wooden seats, are bobbing painfully around behind the whip-cracking driver; Leaning on the rail of the top deck, he collects his threepences, and then comes down again and sits on a little removable seat barring the entrance to the vehicle. Nothing more to do. He looks casually at the unfortunate people rolling and jolting around amidst an inferno of clanking metal, shaking windows, horses’ farts and ringing bells. He listens to a child humming on its mother’s knees, beating time with its legs on neighbouring knee-caps; and then, tired of looking at these two rows of passengers bowing to each other at every jolt, he turns away and gazes vaguely at the road behind him.

What is he thinking about, as the bus runs lopsidedly along, always through the same gutters and along the same routes? For his amusement there are the placards swaying in the wind advertising rooms to let, the shops closed for deaths or marriages, or the litter lying in front of a rich invalid’s door. It is all right in the morning, when this moving sieve of the Danaïdes begins its fruitless task, first taking on and then letting off the flood of passengers, but during the day, after he has spelled out the notices and annoyed the greengrocer’s dog, which yaps at him on sight, what is there left for him to do, or think about? Life would be unbearably monotonous if there wasn’t the occasional chance of catching a sneak-thief with his hand in somebody else’s pocket. But when you

come to think of it, doesn't this group of men and women present a spectacle as old as the world, yet nevertheless still quite amusing? A young lady is sitting with her eyes closed, and a young man is sitting opposite her. What incredible skill is needed for these two people, who have never seen each other before, to manage, without saying a word, to agree to get off at the same time, and go around the same corner! In the absence of voice and gestures, what ardent, romantic phrases can be expressed by a leg as it furtively approaches, rubs against that of its neighbour like an amorous, purring cat, draws back a little when it feels the other one avoiding its pressure, then returns, and, finding less resistance, ventures to press its foot!

What memories of youth, eh, conductor? Do you remember those happy, youthful days, before a well-dressed gentleman with a sash round his belly bound you indissolubly, in the name of the law, to the torment of your life, your accursed wife *Mélanie*! Ah! You've certainly got time to think about that trollop, and the way she knocks you about, makes you eat cold food, and calls you an idler and a good-for-nothing any time you happen to have drunk a little more of the delicious local wine than usual!

If only there were some way of divorcing her and taking another wife, of being like *Machut* whose home life is so happy, life would not be so hard, the brats would be better fed and brought up, and one would be able to put up with the complaints of one's superiors far more patiently; the unfortunate husband gazes at a milliner's assistant at the other end of the vehicle, who is looking through the windows, and across the rumps of the galloping horses, at the swarming crowds in the street. She looks gentle, her hands are still soft and pink, one could be happy with someone so young, but . . .

"Passengers for *Courcelles*!"

"Are there any changes?"

"Get on, numbers 8, 9 and 10."

—Ting! Ting! Ting!

The vehicle continues on its way, charged with its cargo of heads, arms and legs. The young girl gets out at the last stop, and can be seen trotting along in the distance with her little oilcloth bag. The conductor cannot stop thinking about her, and he checks over the qualities she might have possessed.

He imagines her blushing at the gentle prick of his moustache; she certainly would not have been crotchety and cantankerous like



his wife ! He is already a hundred miles from reality, living in the land of dreams, when suddenly the well-known cry recalls him to the demands of duty.

“ Stop, stop ! ”

—Ting !

## THE STREET-WALKER

For her, as for others, vice has completed its accustomed task. It has refined the bold ugliness of her face, and made it desirable. Without losing any of her original suburban grace, the whore, with her gaudy finery and her boldly made-up charms, has become tempting and appetizing to the bored palates of those whose blunted senses can only be aroused by violent cosmetics and tumultuous, spectacular clothes.

She has attained that distinction within vulgarity which is so delicious in those daughters of the people who have risen in the world. The slut has lost the dark complexion and stale smell so typical of dirty poverty ; and now pipe-dottle has been replaced by cigar-ash, drinking-mugs by wine-glasses, rough quarts of piccolo and vin ordinaire by dusty bottles of the best vintages, and the old iron bedstead has been transformed into a wide, upholstered bed with a canopy set with mirrors ; the street-walker now displays a dazzling façade of flesh carefully touched up with mercury bichloride and cosmetics. But one evening the cruel downfall suddenly comes. On that evening, Polyte, who has secretly been supplying her with a love seasoned with kicks and blows, imprudently lingers too late ; and the sober, kindly cashier who had been keeping her leaves her on the spot, and returns to his family, where he regularly reproaches his sons on their lack of morals.

The ups and downs now follow close on each other's heels ; a regiment of all ages has billeted with her ; as she stands on the look-out in a café doorway, her sunken, black-ringed eyes set snares for the passers-by, but her impudent yet woe-begone smile scares the average customer, who expects happiness only from the usual type of kiss and the anticipated grimaces.

And so her mysterious, sinister beauty remains unappreciated, and, whatever the weather, she has to remain lying in wait for whole evenings, for whole nights on end, like a poacher firing at



game which still manages to get away ; though on her lucky nights she succeeds in bringing down a few drunkards.

But most of the time she comes home empty-handed, with an empty belly ; she manages to stave off the hunger with alcohol, but her head is full of catarrh, and she goes to bed worn out, alone, dreaming of the ruffian who ruined her, and of their impatient meetings in the tavern in the Place Pinel, the tavern on whose wretched façade these words were written : " Drink Rigolboche ".

However distant and half-forgotten that time may be, the street-walker can still see it, in the lucid fits of insomnia brought about by fatigue and abortive drinking-bouts. Though she has been emptied and then returned like a bottle, she still quivers at the memory of the caresses and delights she used to heap on that man. Details of a stupid yet emotional interest came back to her ; she recalls his hair, and the way it was cut into two horn-like points above his ears ; she remembers his pea-green shirts, the ties she used to tie for him, the little kisses and blandishments he showered on her when he wanted some money to stand another of his conquests a glass of rigolboche, that pink juice flavoured with vanilla, the maraschino of the rag-pickers !

And then the light of morning fills her room, and the afternoon passes by ; she still has to get up and go on with the hard life she has been saddled with. The day goes by exactly like the previous one, exactly like the inevitable morrow. The buyers become fewer and fewer, or else they despicably swindle her of the price of her trouble.

Destroyed by night and by day, consumed by an inextinguishable thirst, all she can do is quench that of Polyte, who thrashes and kicks her as a reward.

Then the decay becomes even greater, for these thrashings and nights of love, these days of starvation alternating with dissipation, all combine to sink her hollow eyes even deeper in her ravaged face. Under the threat of perishing from hunger, she is forced to fill out the hollows in her cheeks, or to keep her ample, overflowing flesh within the bounds of a corset ; the cost of stuffing, whalebones, and cosmetics cleans out the street-walker's purse. The harvest of her vices is ripe and the scythe is ready. So gee-up, dung-cart ! To the Hôpital de Lourcine !

## THE WASHERWOMAN

NEVER since Nausicaa of Homeric and tedious memory, have queens washed their clothes themselves, with the exception of those goddesses chosen at *mi-carême*, amidst the gurgling of drinks and the clink of glasses; and for a long time now the cleaning of petticoats and stockings has been entrusted to simple slatterns with arms broad enough to wield an iron. Not for a good many years have washerwomen been scented with benjamin and amber like Lancret's pink laundresses; and, indeed if such women still exist, theirs must be only an intermittent trade, their true profession undoubtedly being more lucrative, but less reputable.

Yes, they have certainly got a bad reputation. . . . The old ones prow about like mangy bitches, continually gorging themselves and boozing, thirsty as they are from the heat of the boilers. . . . The young ones whore it up, wild with lust, and go on the loose the moment they leave the wash-houses! . . . So what? Do you imagine that their life is at all gay, and do you deny them the right to bury the long day's depression in the depths of beds and tankards? Let them make love, let them drink! Because standing at their work amidst the perpetual rain from the washing on the lines above their heads, feeling the water run down the curly nape of their necks and gently flow down the small of their backs; breathing in the steam from the washing, getting their hands burnt by the boiler-furnace; carrying loads of sheets on their shoulders, swaying their hips in order to support enormous baskets; walking, running, never resting; soaking shirts in blue water, twisting them, wringing them, ironing them; starching cuffs, goffering bonnets; being as unreliable as possible, removing identification marks; losing linen, damaging it, getting it returned without payment by women, getting it accepted and paid for by men; all this is their terrible task, their appalling life!

And how many of them pass through the last stages of the Passion! Their Road to the Cross begins at the kindling of the boiler, and ends at the wash-tubs on the river banks! When age has silenced the murmurs of their flesh and made a glass of rot-gut appear the supreme consolation, when they have vainly wandered around the market in the Rue aux Ours until nine o'clock in the morning, looking for an employer, they finally run aground, full of

catarrh, in the area washed by the sickly, snuff and medlar-colour waters of the Bièvre. Squatting there like strange monsters, from the first flush of dawn until the mists of nightfall, wearing scarves over their heads, and plunging into the tubs up to their armpits, they soap and beat the linen with all their might, as it lies dripping on the planks.

Seen from behind, when they are deep in dirty foam, their backbones jut out beneath their filthy smocks, and strands of tousled hair like onion-peel runs over their shiny skin; and there they stand under the old red umbrellas, lean and dismal, howling like wolves at any urchins who jeer at them, or straightening up their bent carcasses under the weight of their baskets of washing, and, with one hand on their hips and the other at their mouths like a loudspeaker, pouring out at the passers-by those torrents of abuse which have earned them the slang nickname of "cheeky wash-tubs".

## THE JOURNEYMAN BAKER

O WATTEAU, melancholy inventor of flamelessly burning black eyes and provoking yet cold lips, painter of defenceless Cydalises reflecting their trains of pink moire in the blue waters of lakes, one cold evening recently I thought of your sardonic Gilles, with his white face, his anxious eyes, and his round red mouth breaking up the milky oval of flesh.

As I was sauntering along the outer boulevards, in the former suburbs, at the time when the tripe-shops' iron bars throw their broken shadows onto the muddy roads amid a pool of light, I suddenly caught a glimpse of an incredibly tall marionnette slipping along past the shop-fronts, with a bottle of wine in one hand and a pipe in the other.

I was certain that this strange character must be that sprightly, sly fellow, that great opener of girls and ravisher of bottles, Harlequin's eternal rival: Pierrot. Humbly yet shiftily he went on his way, hugging the walls. Suddenly he stopped in front of one of the houses, pushed open a little door, and seemed to fall into a black hole, like a lily plunging its stem into an inkwell; soon he reappeared in a cellar whose windows had just lit up on a level with the pavement.

Through the bulging, broken and twisted wire netting, I could see a window-pane sprinkled with white powder, a row of sacks, an axe, a shovel, and a kneading trough; on this trough was a mound of dough, at which two livid, yelling men, without shirts or jackets, were furiously hurling themselves, while the dough banged dully every time it fell back onto the wood.

They growled, groaned, shouted inarticulately, and uttered heart-breaking moans, as they vigorously beat the limp mass. Ah! Ah! Ah! Ah! Bang! Thump! Aah! The putty-like substance twisted and writhed like a snake under their blows! By now their bodies were streaming with sweat, the biceps of their arms were rippling, and great drops of sweat were beading on their foreheads and drinking in the flour that had gathered on their temples.

They went on striking the dough, like madmen, and then, after a shout torn from their very bowels, they stilled their flailing arms, rubbed their fingers on the kneading-trough, and, tipping their heads backwards, drank an enormous amount from their bottles, while their Adam's apples bobbed madly around in their necks.

With an abrupt movement they threw themselves forward and took the necks of the bottles away from their mouths; little streams of wine flowed from each side of their mouths, widening as they wound around their dusty chins.

Once again I recognised him, your thieving, drunken model, O Watteau! Once again I found him, the greedy rascal, but he was only there for a few seconds. Soon the harmonious gurgle of their throats stopped. The bottles were empty, so the men in the bakehouse resumed their desperate task.

One of them moulded the dough into shape, and then the other put it into a brick oven whose wide-open mouth was emitting a lurid glow caused by a pile of blazing birch-logs.

You poor exhausted pierrots, you bakers! You who, at the time when filthy sewer-men pump out the latrines, and at that solemn hour when some people are forcing open the doors of others, and when others are buying mistresses of other people for hard cash, groan and grunt at your work, and perform your war-chant and cannibal dances around the kneading-trough; you, who howl and guzzle like wolves, and drink like fishes; it is you to whom, with the God of the poor, the daily prayers are addressed: Give us this day our daily bread, o ye white wrestlers! All corn and no oats, understand?—Amen!

## THE CHESTNUT-MAN

THE paving-stones shake under the rumbling drays and wagons; dogs scurry along at full speed, and the passers-by are forced to quicken their pace, blinded and deafened by a furious squall of rain and hail. The weathercocks on the houses creak madly around, badly closed windows utter heartrending groans, and rusty door-hinges squeak atrociously; meanwhile, along at the street corner, in a recess next to a wine-shop, the chestnut-seller remains unperturbed, as he yells at the freezing passers-by: "Hot chestnuts! Hot chestnuts! Oh!"

How many frivolous or serious events must this man be in a position to see, as he stands with his belly to the fire and his face to the wind, watching the golden-skinned chestnuts sputter on his open stove, or moving them around as they simmer under the sacking! How many comedies, how many tragedies, how many prologues to novels, how many epilogues to short stories he must hear on those winter mornings when the dawn breaks so cold and icy!

There he stands in his stall, lighting the fire and fanning the charcoal with his bellows, while he avidly listens to the chatter, gossip and tittle-tattle of the dairy-women and the concierges.

All the physical frailties of the neighbourhood, all the vices of the houses nearby, are paraded before him. The gossip from pantries and concierges' lodges, which reveals that the gentleman living on the first floor is a cuckold, and specifies the day and the hour at which his wife deceives him every week, is supplemented by nursemaids' whining complaints about their paltry wine-ration, their mistresses' requirements, their masters' attempts at seduction, and the children's exhausting and precocious tastes.

What a chronicle of filth he could have kept, ever since he first put on his apron and began slitting open the skins of chestnuts! How many harsh or caressing words he must have heard, snapped or murmured by the couples who brush past him; how many tipsy women, whores, drunkards and amiable thieves he must have seen nabbed by policemen! How many falls, traffic accidents, broken ribs, dislocated limbs, and crowds in front of chemists' shops he must have looked at, while still continuing to slit the brown



chestnut-skins, and to move the crackling, popping chestnuts around with his wooden knife!

Yet life is not a bed of roses in this bloody trade; wind, drizzle, rain and snow all have their fling; the stove shakes and rattles in the gusty wind, emitting great billows of smoke which make him smart and reduce his voice to a whisper: the charcoal sputters and soon goes out, and his prospective customers quickly pass by with their heads hunched down in the collars of their overcoats, not one of them stopping at his stall; and behind him, through the windows separating him from the wine reservoir, the poor man can see whole regiments of large-bellied, highly-coloured bottles lined up, bright, sparkling and inviting, on a board in front of a mirror. How attractive and fascinating they are! Who can express the charm of wine-measures and of tafia? Look away, you poor devil. Forget cold, hunger, and the alluring bottles, and go on singing your nasal lament: "Hot chestnuts, oh!"

Go on, tire yourself out until you collapse, blow on the stinking charcoal, breathe in the steam from the cooking chestnuts, get your throat filled with ashes, soak your burnt hands and scorched fingers in water, drain and shuck the chestnuts, sell your wares to greedy children and dilatory women; shout, O philosopher, shout! Strike up your miserable refrain at the top of your voice, until well into the night, as you stand in the cold gas-light: "Hot chestnuts, hot chestnuts, oh!"

## THE HAIRDRESSER

You start by sitting down in front of a mahogany cheval-glass, on whose marble slab there stand phials of lotions, dark blue glass jars of toilet-powder, bristly hairbrushes, fine-toothed combs filled with hair, and an open pot of hair-cream with the imprint of an index finger right in the middle of the yellow paste.

And then the exorbitant torture begins.

Your body is wrapped in a kind of *peignoir*, and a napkin is crammed down like a pad between your neck and the collar of your shirt; and then, as you feel the cold sweat of suffocation beginning to break out on your temples, a hand pushes your head down to the right, and your skin shudders at the cold touch of the scissors.



To the steady click-click of the shears your hair begins to scatter like rain, fall in your eyes, stick in your eyelashes, attach itself to your nostrils, and stay tickling and pricking the corners of your lips; meanwhile the hand pushes your head again, this time down to the left.

Eyes right, eyes left, eyes front! And these see-saw movements, worthy of a Punch and Judy show, go on, aggravated by the galloping scissors as they manoeuvre around your ears, run over your cheeks, break your skin, creep along your temples, and obstruct your dazzled, squinting eyes.

"Do you want to read the paper, Sir?"

"No."

"Fine weather, isn't it, Sir?"

"Yes."

"We haven't had such a mild winter for years."

"No."

There is a pause; the funereal gardener remains silent. Holding the back of your head in his hands, in defiance of all the most recognized principles of hygiene, he swings it up and down very fast, breathing on your face, and then inspects you in the looking-glass to see whether your shorn hair is all the same length; then he continues to trim you here and there, and begins to play hide-and-seek with your head again, trying to press it down into your stomach so that he may more easily judge the object of his handiwork. The suffering becomes unbearable.—Oh where are the benefits of science then, the vaunted anaesthetics, the pale morphines, the faithful chloroforms, the calming ethers?

By now the hairdresser is panting and blowing like a grampus, worn out by his efforts; once more he hurls himself at your head, raking it with a little comb and ceaselessly planing it with two brushes.

A sigh of relief escapes your lips as he lays down his combs and shakes your peignoir.

"Do you want a scalp massage, Sir?"

"No."

"A shampoo, then?"

"No."

"You're wrong not to, Sir. It hardens your scalp, and gets rid of scurf."

In a tired, defeated voice you end up by agreeing on a shampoo, with all hope lost of ever escaping from this den alive.

Then a kind of dew begins to fall, drop by drop, onto your head; the barber, with his sleeves rolled up for the job, starts ruffling your hair, and soon the dew, which smells of orangeade, changes into foam; glancing into the mirror you are amazed to see what looks like a plate of *oeufs à la neige* on your head, with the barber's fat fingers immersed in it.

And now the moment has come for the torture to reach its final agony. Your head is knocked roughly around in the hands of the roaring, gesticulating hairdresser, like a ball from racket to racket; your neck cricks, your eyes water, your face turns purple, and you feel as though you are going mad. In a last flash of sense, in a last prayer, you implore the heavens to make you bald!

However, at last the operation comes to an end. You get up, pale and unsteady, as though recovering from a long illness; your torturer guides you, plunges your head into a wash-basin, seizes it by the nape of the neck, douses it liberally with cold water, and then squeezes it tightly with a napkin and guides it back onto the chair, where it lies white and motionless, like an overcooked bit of meat.

After all the cruel suffering you have endured, there only remain the distasteful final manipulations; the sticky mess rubbed in the barber's palms and then plastered on your skull, after a final scraping from his combs.

Now it is all over, you have been ungarroted and can stand up, free; waving aside offers of soap and hair-oil, you pay up, and then flee from the perilous den as fast as your legs will carry you; but outside in the open air your frenzy wears away, your outlook becomes more balanced, and your brain gradually begins to function again.

You are certainly feeling better, and younger. While weeding out your hair, the hairdresser has almost miraculously relieved you of the weight of several years; the weather seems different, milder; new spiritual blooms begin to flourish, but alas, they fade almost immediately, as the hairs which have fallen down inside your shirt begin to make their itching presence felt. And so, with a cold already on its way, you slowly return home, marvelling at the eternal heroism of those monks who voluntarily allow their skin to be scratched night and day by rough horsehair shirts.

## LANDSCAPES

### THE BIÈVRE

*To Henry Céard.*

NATURE is only interesting when she is sickly and desolate. I will not attempt to deny her marvels and her glories on the occasions when the heartiness of her laughter causes her to split her bodice of dark rocks and flaunt her green-nippled bosom in the sunlight; but I must admit that I do not experience, when faced with the exuberance of her full-flowing sap, anything like the pitying attraction which is aroused in me by a desolate corner in a large town, a ravaged piece of hillside, or a narrow ditch dribbling along between two slender trees.

Fundamentally, the beauty of a landscape is made up of melancholy. The Bièvre, with its desperate attitude and reflective, suffering air, delights me more than any other, and I deplore the destruction of its trees and gullies as the greatest of crimes! This suffering landscape, this ragged stream, these broken plains were all that was left to us, and now they are going to be dismembered! Every section of land will be put up for sale, every bowlful of water will be auctioned, the marshes will be filled in, the roads will be levelled, and the dandelions, the brambles, and all the flora of the rubbish heaps and the waste land will be torn up; the Rue du Pot-au-Lait and the road to the fountain at Mulard will disappear, together with the heathland that lies between them, choked up with slag and rubbish, broken up by old pipes and flower-pots, scattered here and there with puddles, piles of ashes, and rotten, flyblown fruit, and filled with the stench from the wet mattress-straw and the piles of filth gradually gathering in the porridgy mire; and the melancholy view of an Artesian well and the Butte aux Cailles, and the distant prospects in which the Pantheon and the Val-de-Grace, separated by factory chimneys, raise their violet domes against the glowing embers of the clouds, will soon give way to the foolish joys and banal delights of new houses!

Have those who have decided on the looting and pillage of these

banks never been moved by the distressed inertia of the poor, or the painful smile of the sick? Do they only admire nature when she is haughty and tricked out in all her finery? Have they never, in an hour of depression, climbed up to the slopes overlooking the Bièvre? Have they never looked properly at this strange stream, this drain for all kinds of filth, this slate-grey bilge shot here and there with greenish eddies, and studded with cloudy gobs of spittle, as it gurgles over a sluice-gate and then disappears, sobbing, through a hole in a wall? In places, the water is stagnant, and seems to be sick and leprous, but soon its sooty flow begins again, and it continues its course, slowed down by mud. At first it passes bare huts, disreputable sheds, saltpetred walls and tartarous bricks, a whole range of dreary colours on the background of which a red cambric eiderdown hanging in a bedroom window seems to strike a martial bugle note; then it passes shutterless tawers' sheds, upturned wheelbarrows, a pitchfork, a rake, solidified waves of skin-wool, and a mound of tanner's bark with a scarlet-crested, black-tailed hen scratching about on it. In the air above, the scraped hides wave around in the wind, standing out clearly, with their raw whiteness, against the green, rotting fences; on the ground dropsical tubs stand around, enormous casks in which the skins' liquefied crust pickles amidst colours ranging from russet to dirty blue; and further on there are poplars rising out of the muddy clay, and a mass of hovels jumbled one on top of the other, sordid cattlesheds with windows covered with dirty washing, seething with a whole tribe of brats.

Yes, it is true that the Bièvre is nothing more than a moving dung-heap; yet it waters the last poplars to exist anywhere in the city. True, it emits a fetid stench of stagnation, an aroma of the charnel house; but just place a barrel-organ at the foot of one of its trees, and make it gasp out the melodies that fill its belly; or let the voice of a beggar-woman resound in this valley of misery, let her sing, as she sits by the water, a woeful lament learned at a sing-song, a ballad extolling the little birds and begging for love; and then tell me whether this wailing does not stir you to the depths of your soul, and whether this sobbing voice does not appear to be the desolate complaint of the poor suburbs themselves.

A little sunlight—and then, O desolation, O joy, the frogs begin to croak beneath the reeds, a dog stretches himself with paws spread out and his tail in the air, a woman passes by with a little basket on her arm, a man in a cap trudges past with a short clay pipe

between his teeth, and an old white hack, as thin as a skeleton, grazes on the waste ground, looked after by some urchins rolling around in the mud.

The changes have already begun. The embankment of the Rue de Tolbiac is already blocking the horizon; and whitewash will soon be masking with its uniformity the mottled ulcers of the ailing district; the vast expanses of grey sky which still silhouette the skin-dressers' and chamoisers' open-air drying-places will soon be shut out for ever. Soon there will be no sign of the charming walk so often taken by intimists across the plain furrowed by the miserable, labouring Bièvre.

### THE "CABARET DES PEUPLIERS"

THE plain stretches out before you, arid and bleak. Great clumps of thistles and nettles cover it, broken here and there by the dried-up pools of the stagnant Bièvre.

On the left, the corner of a pool, left unmildewed by the pistachio-green duckweed, glistens in the sunlight like a piece of flashing glass.

In the distance there are one or two ramshackle huts with mattresses hung in their windows and flowers planted in old pots and milk-cans around them; ailing trees stand at irregular intervals, displaying their paralysed arms like beggars, shaking their stuttering heads in the wind, and bending their trunks down towards the incurably diseased soil which has so poorly nourished them.

To the right, the river flows along the plain like a thin ribbon, accompanying the road as it plunges under the arch of a bridge, until it reaches the open gate in the ramparts. Green marshland plants flourish here and there on richer soil, and at one point there are eight vigorous poplars surrounding a little house whose rough-cast walls appear through the green and yellow lacework of the leaves in delightful patches of pink. Up near the roof there is a notice saying "Wines for Sale".

At the sight of the coquettish colouring and the arbours running down towards the water, you involuntarily think of the pleasant décor of stage inns; you cannot help thinking, too, of a hall sprinkled with sand, and a walnut cupboard adorned with iron fittings, pewter jugs and floral crockery; and you reflect that it



would be very pleasant to drink some of the sourish local wine off one of their tables, to cut a vast slice from a round-loaf of bread, and to eat large omelettes sprinkled with chives or barded with bacon, washing them down with copious draughts of liquor.

But then you come closer, crossing over the motionless river by a footbridge, and this inn, which had seemed so clean, simple and good-natured, suddenly becomes gloomy and sinister, like a robbers' or murderers' den.

The smile of its pink walls has vanished, revealing an atrocious bloodshot-red colour; a premature and wretched old age has bowed its rafters and made the roof sag. The sight of this shanty reminds you of a fearful prostitute who waylays and murders people as soon as night falls.

Tattoo-marks of black paint can be seen beneath the horrible epidermis of battered plaster; they are letters, eaten away by the passing seasons, yet forming words that are still intelligible: "Rabbit stew, beer and wines, all for sale at the rendezvous among the poplars."—An alarming silence hangs around the little hovel, and the old fashioned street-lamps lining the road seem to take on a baleful, suspicious look; you shiver at the idea of being there alone late at night.

Sitting under an arbour, at a table made from a plank placed on four battens, you shout several times for service, and finally a servant girl appears at the end of the path; the first impression is of a belly thrust forward as she walks, a head swathed in linen, sunken eyes and hollow, freckled cheeks.

After a short consultation with her mistress, who hesitates a moment, fearing the police, this girl brings you some massive glasses which still bear badly-wiped traces of other mouths. She pours out some of the asses' piss that is manufactured in the immense ramshackle building in the middle of the plain, the brewery of the old Barrière Blanche; and then, if you follow the girl's gaze through the leaves into a neighbouring clump of trees, you see a sleeping workman, wearing an open-necked cotton shirt which pouches out above the leather belt round his waist. As he turns over, cursing the flies, you catch a glimpse of the other side of his face, smeared hideously, like the walls of the hovel, with a broad stain of wine and blood.

No carts or drays pass by to disturb the tranquillity of the deserted lane; only the rumbling of the railway echoes for a moment now and then; flecks of white steam blow away from it,



and come to nest in the roof of the harbour; a cock crows his clarion-call, shaking his red crest and flourishing the tuft of bottle-green and golden feathers in his tail; a flock of ducks throw themselves with frightful quacks into the Bièvre, waking it up so that it exhales its breath of stale manure; and then, if you look at the horizon in the direction of the ramparts, streaked with the circle road, salutary but unconsoling thoughts come to you.

Right upon high, seeming to fill the sky, Bicêtre rears its enormous mass, looming over the whole of Paris like a threat, reminding us of the disastrous fate that awaits the factitious energy of our jaded senses, the ill-considered expenditure of our brains, and the sufferings of our disappointed loves and ambitions.

Fearsome and imposing lighthouse that it is, marking the reefs of the great city, Bicêtre completes the distressing impression of life that has already been invoked in us by the Bièvre, which is so blue and joyful at Buc, but which becomes blacker and sicklier as it continues on its way, worn out by the incessant tasks inflicted on it, and finally ends up crippled and putrid after its heavy labours, as it falls, exhausted, into the sewer, which sucks it in with one gulp, only to spit it out again far away, in a forgotten corner of the Seine.

## THE RUE DE LA CHINE

*To Jules Robin*

FOR those who hate the boisterous joys released every Sunday in Paris after a whole week of restraint; for those who want to escape the tedious opulence of the rich districts of the city, Ménilmontant will always seem a promised land, a Canaan filled with gentle melancholy.

The Rue de la Chine, that extraordinary and delightful street, lies in a quiet corner of this area. Although it has been truncated and mutilated by the erection of a hospital, which has added to the discreet, contemplative aspect of the fenced and hedged cottages the distressing spectacle of human suffering, as the patients wander around in the treeless and flowerless courtyards above the road, nevertheless this street has managed to retain the blithe appearance of a country lane, enlivened by the colours of its small houses and gardens.

Just as it stands, this street is the living contradiction of the

boring symmetry and the banal alignment of our great new roads. Everything is askew in it ; the unpaved road, with an open gutter running down the middle of it, has neither stone nor brick walls ; but on either side of it there are plank fences, mottled with green moss and veneered golden-brown with tar, which are falling down in places, dragging down whole clusters of ivy, and almost destroying a gate which has obviously been bought at the auction of some big house or other ; this gate is covered with mouldings whose delicate grey colour still shows through the brown coating left by continual touch of dirty hands.

The one-storey cottages can hardly be seen through the trellis-work of Virginia creeper, as they stand in the middle of a tangle of valerian, hollyhocks, and moulting sunflowers with bald, black heads like bull's-eyes.

Behind the wooden fence you invariably see a zinc fishpond, two pear-trees linked by a washing-line, and a little kitchen-garden with yellow-flowered gourds and beds of cabbages and sorrel, criss-crossed by the shadows of the poplars and lacquer-trees.

And so the street continues, letting you catch quick glimpses, through clearings in the greenery, of the corners of red and violet roofs ; it carries on, gradually narrowing, with sudden twists, turns and climbs, and set, here and there, with old-fashioned oil street-lamps, until it reaches the interminable, heart-breaking Rue de Ménilmontant.

In this immense district, where poor wages doom women and children to perpetual privations, the Rue de la Chine and the adjoining streets, like the Rue des Partants and the amazing Rue Orfila, with its fantastic windings and sudden turns, its fences of badly squared wood and its deserted garden wildernesses, abounding in wild shrubs and rank weeds, strike an unique note of soothing calm. Here, unlike the plain of the Gobelins, there is no misery of nature corresponding to the inexorable distress of the population ; instead, under an open sky, one sees a country path where most of the passersby have obviously eaten and drunk recently ; it is the nook longed for by artists seeking solitude ; it is the haven craved by anguished souls whose only desire is salutary rest far from the human crowd ; it is, for the outcasts of fortune and for those who are crushed by life, a place of solace, born of the unavoidable prospect of the Hôpital Tenon, with its tall chimneys splitting the heavens, and its windows filled with pale faces leaning out and looking at the plain with the profound, avid eyes of convalescents.

Yes, this street is merciful to the afflicted, and charitable to the embittered, for at the thought that there are poor people lying inside that gigantic hospital, in long wards filled with white beds, you find your own sufferings and complaints infantile and empty ; and at the sight of the cottages hidden away in this little lane, you dream of a delightful retreat, and a small amount of money which would allow you to work only when you wanted to, and would prevent you from hurrying the creation of a work for the sake of material needs.

It is true that as soon as you have gone back to the centre of the city, you have to admit to yourself that you would be overwhelmed by the most crushing boredom in that isolated cottage, in that deserted little road ; and yet, every time you come and steep yourself once more in the sad, gentle atmosphere of the street, your impression remains the same, and you feel that the peace and oblivion you have sought far away in the contemplation of monotonous beaches could perhaps be found here, at the end of a bus route, in this little village lane hidden away amidst the merry yet sorrowful tumult of the main streets of one of Paris' poorer districts.

## THE VIEW FROM THE NORTHERN RAMPARTS OF PARIS

FROM the top of the ramparts you can see the marvellous yet terrible view of the plains which lie, exhausted, at the feet of the city.

On the horizon, against the sky, tall brick chimneys are vomiting billows of smoke into the clouds, while lower down, scarcely rising above the tarred canvas and sheet-iron covering the roofs of the workshops, jets of white steam are escaping with a shrill whistle from thin cast-iron pipes.

This naked zone stretches out before you, swollen by occasional hillocks on which groups of children are flying kites made of old newspapers, adorned with coloured pictures such as are stuck in shop doorways or on the ends of bridges, as advertisements.

Near huts whose glass roofs, like clear lakes, are lined with pale red tiles, huge carts raise their chained arms to the skies, and shelter beneath them an occasional suburban romance, or a mother with a child eagerly sucking at her dried-up breasts. Further on, a goat

tied to a stake is peacefully browsing ; a man is sleeping on his back, with his cap over his eyes, and a woman is sitting nearby, mending clothes.

An immense silence covers the plain, for the rumbling of Paris has gradually ceased, and noise only occasionally reaches you from the factories you can see before you. From time to time, however, you can hear, like a terrible moan, the hoarse, muffled whistle of the trains leaving the Gare du Nord as they go by, hidden by embankments covered with ash-trees and acacias.

Right in the distance, there is a wide white road, climbing until it disappears into the sky ; and on its summit a cloud seems to gather, as an invisible cart, hidden by a fold in the land, raises a smokescreen of dust.

Towards nightfall, when sooty clouds roll down and smother the dying day, the landscape becomes endless and depressing ; the factories are now nothing but indefinite outlines, masses of ink drunk in by a livid sky ; the women and children have gone home, and the plain seems even vaster, as, alone on the dusty road the beggar, or *mendigo*, as the children call him, goes home to his resting-place ; sweating and exhausted, he arduously climbs the slope, sucking his long-empty pipe ; and behind him come dogs, magnificent, unbelievable dogs of manifold bastardies, sad dogs accustomed, like their master, to every kind of hunger and every type of flea.

And it is at this moment, above all, that the plaintive charm of the suburbs can truly be felt ; it is at this moment that nature displays her most powerful beauty, for the landscape is in perfect harmony with the families that inhabit it.

Created incomplete, in anticipation of the rôle that man will assign to it, nature looks to that master for the finishing touches.

Sumptuous buildings which contribute to the prosperous appearance of the districts inhabited by rich people, cottages which speckle the happy, peaceful countryside with yellow and white patches, Parc Monceaux which are as tittivated as the women who walk their beat within them, great ironworks and blast furnaces which rise amidst landscapes as imposing yet exhausted as themselves ; such is the eternal rule. And it is in order to apply this rule, in order to carry into effect the instinct for harmony that obsesses us, that we have delegated engineers to sort out nature according to our needs, and to adapt it to the pleasant or pitiful lives that it has the task of enframing and reflecting.

## FANTASIES AND FORGOTTEN CORNERS

### PROSE BALLAD TO THE TALLOW CANDLE

*To Gabriel Thyébaud*

WHEN the Carcel lamp ruled all, and lit the rooms of prosperous families, it was you alone who flickered in those garrets where a pauper's daughter, still a child, would stand and thoughtfully compute the value of her sprouting charms. O tallow candle, sputtering candle!

But soon the beauty of her body is spoiled, made over-ripe by dissipation; her breasts hang loosely, and her belly sags; the money gained by her body's sweat is gone, and hunger rules the day. It is no longer Madame Julia, but Old Mother Jules who tipsily snuffs you out, O tallow candle, sputtering candle!

But now the sight of you evokes more personal memories within me; as I see your wick spread like a mushroom, and lie glowing in a pool of tallow, I recall my childhood, and those long winter evenings when, tired of my tears and screams, my mother used to send me to the kitchen, there to hear the maid spell out aloud the stories from the book of fairy-tales, O tallow candle, sputtering candle.

But these distant recollections gradually fade in their turn, and I am assailed by grievous memories of ideals eternally crushed. I think of those dismal lodgings where I sat in desolation, awaiting the arrival of a mistress; my ears were continually pricked up, even though I kept repeating to myself that she would never come; and all the time I watched the lavatory flies dancing around your flame, roasting themselves, O tallow candle, sputtering candle!

Even though you have been ousted by oil and paraffin, even though you are nowadays forsaken even by the poor, you have at least been adulated as no queen ever was, O smoky candle! Rembrandt, Gerard Dow and Schalken have extolled you on immortal pages; you have illuminated the pink, snowy skins, the straw-coloured hair of Flemish beauties, as their hands protect you from the breeze, O tallow candle, sputtering candle!



## ENVOY

O Princess, let others celebrate the moon's phosphoric gleams, the lantern's glowing flames, or gas's yellow light; it is you alone I love, you alone I wish to praise, O perfect lighting for the great masters, O tallow candle, sputtering candle!

## DAMIENS

*To Robert Caze.*

THE acuity of these painful delights tore a cry from my lips; my ears filled with a buzzing sound, my eyes closed; my nerves seemed to turn in upon themselves, and my head was on the point of bursting; I almost lost consciousness, but then, gradually, my senses began to come back to life—my hearing first of all—and in the distance, the very far distance, I was able to hear, as though in a dream, a swish of water and the sound of a closing door.

Finally I opened my eyes and looked around me; I was alone. The room had red wall-paper, and muslin curtains veiled the cross formed by the window-panes; above a sofa covered with crocheted lace, a round mirror with an engraved frame, leaning out from the wall, reflected such of the room as was behind my back, tilting it slightly; and in it I could see a mantelpiece on which there stood two empty candlesticks and a stationary clock; on either side of a marble wash-basin stood two very low, wide armchairs, underneath two gas lamps which were whistling shrilly as they burned in the silent room.

Like a bed of dazzling tulips planted around a clear lake, flames of colour were burning around the circular mirror, in the bevels of its gilt frame. They made my fascinated eyes burn, and I tried to tear them away from this flaming border of flowers and plunge them into the refreshing water of the mirror; but amid the reflections of furniture that filled it, a shaft of gold flashed from the mantelpiece, stinging my tired eyes with its hard brilliance.

Sharply, with a supreme effort, I tore my eyes away, and raised them to look above my head, imploring the heavens for some saving energy, for some revival of my strength.

It was then that I saw a hideous spectacle.

A man was lying motionless on a bed, with naked legs and



contorted feet; his arms clung stiffly to his sides, and his shirt was drawn up over his knees. His suffused, almost liquid eyes seemed to be pouring over into the deep furrows of his cheeks; his drawn, pale, sunken features, his thin nose joined to his mouth by deep lines, all revealed an overwhelming weariness and the unconsolable grief caused by great calamities.

Long shudders ran along the skin of this still gasping corpse.

I felt that somewhere I had already seen this wretched man lying in agony on his deathbed. But I wandered in vain through the mists of my memory, until suddenly my recollections became clearer, as though seen through a rift.

I was at a print-seller's window in the Rue Bonaparte; and there, amidst a jumble of pictures, a simple old engraving had attracted my attention. It portrayed a man stretched out on a mattress, strapped hand and foot; his eyes were rolling lifelessly in his ravaged face. Four soldiers, dressed in wigs, three-cornered hats, gold-laced tunics and knee-breeches, stood around him with swords in their hands, and behind them two judges wearing clerical bands were staring contemplatively, pen in hand, at the ceiling of the dungeon in which the whole scene was taking place.

Immediately I recalled the title written in pencil under the old print: *Damiens*.—And my thoughts went back through the years to the man of that name, who had so foolishly tried to kill a king with a penknife. I attended, in spirit, the solemn interrogation depicted in the engraving and I imagined the culprit being torn apart by four horses, as indeed he was, on the Place de Grève.—And I began to tremble, for the image of him that I could see above my head was my own reflection in a mirror set in the canopy of the bed; and there I lay, with haggard eyes and drawn features, my arms clinging stiffly to my sides and my shirt drawn up over my knees.

The sound of a door, and a nearby coming and going of feet, shattered the obsession which was haunting me. I sat up, and disturbed the appalling image reflected from the canopy; taking on my normal facial expression, I re-entered my own skin.

I got up and, going towards the mantelpiece, on which the gold 20-franc coin I had already placed there was shining brightly, I smiled, thinking to myself:

The physical analogy I have noted between my own attitude and that of a clumsy assassin is perhaps, on the spiritual plane, even more true.

For had I not morally endured a torture identical with that undergone by the body of the regicide?

Had I not been jolted and torn apart on a spiritual Place de Grève by four different reflections; quartered, as it were:—firstly, by thoughts of base concupiscence;—then by an immediate disillusionment of my desire as soon as I had entered the room;—afterwards, by penitential regret at the money spent;—and finally, by the expiatory distress which is always left behind by the fraudulent contracts of the body, once they have been consummated.

## THE PROSE POEM OF ROAST MEAT

*To Alexis Orsat.*

IT is the deceptive beefsteaks and the illusory chops that are served in public restaurants which foster the ferments of concubinage in the embittered minds of old bachelors.

The moment has come for the reddish, lukewarm, damp-smelling meat to start turning your stomach. Seven o'clock strikes. The bachelor comes into his usual restaurant, looks for his usual table, and is aggrieved when he finds it already occupied. He takes his wine-stained napkin from the rack hanging on the wall and then, after exchanging a few desultory remarks with his neighbour, runs his eye over the unchanging menu, and sits morosely down to his soup, which has already served, as always, to wash the waiter's thumb.

In order to arouse his lost appetite he supplements the humble cost of his dinner with unnecessary extras such as heavily-seasoned salads, and a half-bottle of soda-water.

Then, after gulping down his soup, and rubbing stringy bits of dried-up sirloin around in a commonplace brown sauce, he tries to overcome the terrible disgust that grips his throat and turns his stomach.

One fantasy obsesses him as he looks at the newspaper, without reading it. He keeps remembering a young girl he almost married ten years ago; he imagines himself married to her, eating good food and drinking good Burgundy; but he immediately sees the other side of the picture; and the various stages of an unhappy marriage unfold before his troubled mind. He imagines himself, in the bosom of his new family, having to take part in a continual exchange of

inane ideas, or in interminable games of lotto, enlivened by the recitation of hallowed nicknames given to the numbers. He sees himself longing for bed, but then, having got there, putting up with repeated attacks from his grouching wife; he sees himself at a winter ball, in evening dress, prevented from taking a nap by his wife's furious glance as she dances past; he hears himself being upbraided, on his return home, for his sullen attitude when he had been standing by the door; and, to crown it all, he hears himself being considered as a cuckold. . . . The diner, engrossed by his thoughts, shudders, and eats with a little more resignation a mouthful of the disgusting stew congealing on his plate.

But as he chews the tasteless, leathery meat, and suffers from the sour belches caused by soda-water, the full sadness of the state of celibacy strikes him, and he starts dreaming of a decent kind of girl tired of the hazards of life, who would like an assured future; or of a mature woman whose appetite for love is at an end, a large maternal companion who, in exchange for food and shelter, would be willing to put up with all his old habits, all his little fads.

No family to visit, no dances to torture him, and his meals laid for him at home, at the same time every day; infidelity becomes less and less important, and the chances diminish of giving birth to brats who will perpetually squall under the pretext of cutting teeth; the idea of a mistress, strengthened by his growing disgust for meals eaten away from home, becomes more and more definite and pressing; the bachelor goes down, line, hook and sinker, with his eyes on the distant mirage of a flaming turnspit, on which large, thick rumpsteaks are slowly turning, dripping juicily.

It is the deceptive beef-steaks and the illusory chops that are served in public restaurants which foster the ferments of concubinage in the embittered minds of old bachelors.

## A CAFÉ

NEAR one of our railway stations, on the corner of a square, there stands a museum of natural history, in which the visitors spend their time drinking and playing.

The place is somnolent and placid. It is a café frequented by regular customers, and unused to visitors; a café whose door only opens on known faces, which give rise to cheers and laughter the

moment they are seen; a café where ten local tradesmen meet around the same table every evening to play cards and exchange mediocre comments on contemporary politics, taking great interest meanwhile in the pregnancies of both the *patronne* and her cat; it is a bar where everyone possesses his own pipe, with his name engraved on it, a New Year's present from the waiter, who, dozing as usual over his newspaper, calls out a pitiful, listless "Yes!" every time anyone orders another beer.

The room has a strange appearance; above the dark-brown leather sofas, two glass cases made of grey woodwork with pale blue stripes run along the whole length of the walls, crammed from top to bottom with stuffed, painted birds.

The one facing the door has a bottom shelf full of yellow-beaked swans with straw-packed bellies and thin, badly-stuffed, S-shaped necks; and sacred ibis, with polished, shining feet and dirty red heads the colour of bread soaked in redcurrant jam.

Above them, on boards placed at intervals up to the ceiling, rise tier upon tier of large, medium-sized, small, crooked, bandy, and straight legged birds, some looking like ugly customers, others like fairly decent chaps, some with beaks like pick-axes, filed down to a sharp point, and others with beaks like nozzles or sugar-tongs. they all seem to have the same black and orange eyes, like rosettes and the same idiotic gaze; they are all clothed in coats the colour of nutmeg or pepper, dreadfully faded plumage, and they all have the awkward, stupidly self-satisfied bearing of actors.

When you move closer, the large, sombre patch of dull colour in the glass cases disintegrates into separate birds; game-fowls with beaks like syringes, arranged, without any distinction of caste or friendship, in a miserable, verminous promiscuity; they gaze with peevish, ill-natured faces at some little quails, who are gently and imploringly looking at the heavens, lost as they are amidst whole dynasties of red godwits and quawks, and entire families of herons, standing on one leg waiting for the Lord knows what, and dreaming perhaps of improbable fish stuffed like themselves.

But the plumage of three birds, once vibrant with bright colours, destroys the tearful harmony of this picture. These birds are: a fledgeling without a label, the colour of dirty sulphur; a roller with terribly faded green plumage, arrested in mid-caper; and a soulful, lyrical pheasant with feathers whose golden fire has long been extinguished.

Despite the sad, ludicrous appearance of its inhabitants, strung

out regularly like a row of onions, stuck to black wooden stands or perched on branches covered with artificial moss, this showcase is magnificent in comparison with the other one, an aviary which could serve as a prop-room for a melodrama.

In it, on a series of small boards, are accumulated a whole range of sinister, ugly creatures; groups of owls, buried under layers of dust, with curved, scissor-like beaks, and wings the colour of ash or tinder; nebulous barn-owls, labelled with the Latin words "*Strix nebulosa*"; Ural barn-owls, with the reflective air of blind men; eagle-owls with cunning, ferocious faces; and stupid, melancholy crows, shabby gentlemen shivering in their thin coats of black feathers.

A little higher up, this bird cemetery is completed by a batch of creatures which must have passed through the auction rooms, and were probably bought in a bankruptcy sale; a jumble of rooks and jackdaws, which are, however, far more attractive and chic than the neighbours they are eyeing with such disgust, a group of grumpy, flabby old kites, strutting around in their moth-eaten rags, a whole clan of scoundrelly, braggartly falcons, and some cross-grained, martinettish buzzards.

The proprietor of this establishment, the inventor of this café-museum, seems to have been haunted by one *idée fixe*; not content with filling his show-cases with birds' mummified carcasses, he has also decorated his windows with yellow blinds looking like un-gummed sticking plaster, on which are portrayed, no doubt quite by chance, the civic arms of the Hague, a stork holding a snake in its beak; glossy pythons are wrapped around the pillars of his bar, and the ceiling has been covered with sturgeons hanging from hooks, and great flat fish like enormous combs; and the crowning glory is an old crocodile with spread legs and an open toothless mouth, whose skin is patched up with shoe leather, and between whose jaws whole armies of invading flies march, manoeuvre and manure.

The waiter is extremely astonished whenever curious people ask him about the origin and aim of this café. At first he says nothing, thinking that you are making fun of him, but when he realises the innocence of his questioners, he replies in a scornful, pitying manner: "Oh! There's a far finer one in Bar-le-Duc!"

Satisfied with this reply, as you empty your glass you take in with a last glance the full ugliness of all these birds, feeling not the slightest desire to go and visit Bar-le-Duc, and merely being



reminded, at the sight of all these old men sitting motionless at the tables with their faces buried in their cards, as though preserved in this funereal atmosphere, of a shoddy Versailles or gimcrack Egypt, a necropolis for fowls and men.

## RITORNELLO

HER late husband beat her black and blue, presented her with three children, and then died, absolutely saturated with absinthe.

From that time onwards she has floundered in the mud, pushing her cart along, and yelling at the top of her voice : Rags ! Bones !

She is unbelievably ugly, a kind of monster, with a wrestler's neck, a red, grimacing face, blood-shot eyes, and wide nostrils like tobacco-pouches, covered with pimples and marks.

Her three children have got big appetites ; it is for their sake that she flounders in the mud, pushing her cart, and yelling at the top of her voice : Rags ! Bones !

Her neighbour has just died.

Her husband beat her black and blue, presented her with three children, and then died, absolutely saturated with absinthe.

This monster took them in with no hesitation whatsoever.

These six children have got big appetites ! To work ! To work ! Without respite, without rest, she flounders in the mud, pushing her cart, and yelling at the top of her voice : Rags ! Bones !

## THE ARM-PIT

*To Guy de Maupassant.*

THERE are some smells which are as suspicious and equivocal as a cry in a dark street. They are exhaled by certain working-class districts in Paris, in the summer-time, if you pass near a group of people in the street. Negligence, and the weariness of arms that have toiled at back-breaking tasks, are the explanation for the sharp, goat-like odour that comes from their sleeves.

I have followed the trail of this scent into the countryside, where I found it rising, stronger and rougher, from a party of women



passing by in the sunlight, fresh from tossing the hay. It was excessive, terrible ; it gripped your nostrils, stung them like ammonia, inflamed the membranes with a rough smell savouring of the musky aroma of wild duck cooked in olives, and the sharp odour of shallots. On the whole, the emanation was neither repugnant nor vile ; it harmonized, like an expected element, with the formidable odour of the country side ; it was the pure note that completed, with the human beast's rutting cry, the odoriferous melody of the woods and beasts.

But let us leave this subject ; I prefer not to occupy myself with slovenly armpits, and the human bestiality of the common people, whether in town or country, careless as they are of washing and rest ; I merely want to talk of the divine, exquisite bouquet created by the women in our towns whenever they begin to feel hot, whether at a ball in winter-time, or in the street in summer.

Less filtered by cambric and linen, which refine and vaporize it, as does a handkerchief when scent is poured on it, the perfume of a woman's arms is less clear, less delicate, and less pure when she is wearing a *décolleté* ball dress. The aroma of ammonia and urine sometimes becomes brutally pronounced and often a slight touch of prussic acid, a faint whiff of bruised, overripe peaches, mingles with the breath of perfumes and powder.

But it is at the moment when the *Parisienne* is at her most charming, as, sheltered by her umbrella, she walks along under a leaden sky, in the stifling, ominous weather before a storm ; as, with ravaged eyes, a moist complexion, and a languid, exhausted air, she feels her whole body bathed in sweat ; it is then that her scent leaks out most delightfully, refined by the filter of her clothes, full of delicious impudence tempered with faint timidity.

Women were never more desirable than at these moments, when their thick dresses mould their figures from head to toe, clinging to them like the damp shifts beneath. The appeal of their arms' fragrance is less insolent, less cynical than at the ball, where they would be more naked, but it uncages the hidden beast in man all the more easily.

As varied as the colour of hair, as undulating as the locks which secrete it, the smell of the arm-pit could be divided up until infinity ; no aroma has more nuances ; it is a scale which goes through the whole keyboard of the sense of smell, bordering on the heady odours of seringa and elder, and recalling at times the sweet smell that comes from your fingers after they have held a cigarette.

Bold, and at times tiring, in a girl with brown or black hair, sharp and fierce in a red-head, the arm-pit is elusive yet heady in the case of the blonde, like certain sweet wines, and it almost seems to correspond with the way their lips give a kiss; the brunettes, more vehemently and angrily; the blondes, more personally, perhaps.

But whether the colour of the hair growing under women's arms be dark or light, whether its tufts undulate like a moustache or curl like thin shavings of mahogany or rosewood, it must be admitted that nature is maternal and provident; for she has distributed these spice-boxes in order to season and enhance the stew of love, which habit has rendered so stodgy and insipid for those carnally resigned men who have knowingly consented to renounce, in a much-used bedroom, their imperious desire for rest and diet.

## LOW TIDE

In a shop in the Rue Legendre, in Batignolles, a whole series of headless, legless female busts, with curtain-hooks instead of arms, and calico skins each of one uniform colour, brownish-grey, bright pink, or dark black, can be seen lined up like a row of onions, impaled on sticks or resting on tables.

At first they make you think of a morgue, with the torsos of decapitated bodies standing upright in it; but soon the horror aroused by these decapitated bodies wears away, and you are assailed by suggestive thoughts; for that subsidiary female charm, the bosom, is here displayed before your eyes, faithfully reproduced by the skilful dressmakers who built the models.

Here you can see the bony chests of young girls, the little lumps beaded with drops of reddish wine, the tiny swellings broken by dwarfish points.

And these pubescent sproutings wake within you the dissolute anxiety for the continuance of things begun.

Here, you can see the breasts of women who, though mature, are decidedly thin; slender lilac-coloured turnips, planed boards of knotty pinewood; and there, you see the Epiphany bean-cakes of devout women worn out by prayer and scandalmongering, the suspender-buttons of spinsters flattened and laminated by celibacy.

Further on, in the background, the damage caused by life begins; misery becomes visible in the flabby over-ripe cheeses, the limp

brioche, and the wretched muffed, forever flattened by the disaster of giving suck, for ever spoiled by murderous dissipation.

But after seeing this commencement of growth, and this decline caused by chastity and lechery, we come, as we pass along the tables in the shop, to the sober-minded bourgeoisie, with its half-filled bodices and its medium-sized breasts lit by a pale blue radiance and circled, around their violet nipples, by a brown areola.

Then, after the imperceptible embonpoint of those who are neither fat nor thin, and after the grace of the well-covered woman, corpulence becomes more pronounced, and a terrifying succession of lumps and swellings comes to the fore: the enormous dewlaps, the brick-red, bronze-tipped demijohns of fat nannies; the cyclopean wine-skins of giantesses; the vast lard bladders of clumsy, strapping lasses; and the monstrous, olive-peaked gourds of pot-bellied old women!

As you look at this display of bosoms, this Curtius Museum of breasts, you are vaguely reminded of the cellars where the Louvre's ancient sculptures are kept, and in which the same torso, endlessly repeated, is the well-informed delight of the yawning people who come there on rainy days to look at it.

But how great a difference there is between those inhuman pieces of marble and the calico plumpness of these terrible specimens! The Greek breasts, fashioned according to a formula laid down by the taste of centuries, are nevertheless dead; no kind of suggestion can be inspired in us by those conventional forms, sculpted in a cold material which tires the eyes.—And after all, one must admit that it would be fairly distasteful if the *Parisienne*, when she undressed, displayed such flawless charms, and if in our hours of sinful pleasure, we had only these same monotonous breasts to play around with!

How superior these lifelike dummies are to the dreary statues of Venus! How much more ingratiating these padded busts are, evoking strange dreams within us:—Licentious dreams at the sight of ephebic teats or ripe bosoms:—charitable dreams when confronted with aged breasts shrivelled by chlorosis or swollen with fat:—for they make you think of the sufferings of those unhappy women who despairingly see their bodies dry up or increase in size, and can sense their husbands' impending indifference, their keepers' imminent desertion of them, and the eventual complete destruction of the charms which once enabled them to win the essential battles waged with man's contracted wallet.

## OBSESSION

*To Edmond de Goncourt.*

CONSOLS are going up, industrial securities are holding firm; Panama is going down, Suez is steady.—Crossword and metagram: correct solutions: *Paul Ychinel, le père Spicace, Astre à Caen, Lady Scorde, Miss Tigry, les oedipes du café du Grand-Balcon.*—Rowland's macassar and Guyot's tar. Russian corn cure and Wlinsi paper.—Dry-nurse seeks employment.—No more bald heads! Fresh growth certain, and guaranteed; judge for yourself! Malleron.—Hidden disorders, ulcers, discharges, scurf: Chable, Emmanuel, Péchenet, Albert!

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These advertisements, on the back page of a torn newspaper found in one of my pockets, as I stand at the roadside, with open country on every side as far as the eye can see, succeed in demolishing the long-desired tranquillity which had possessed me. This piece of paper takes me back to Paris, and the apprehensions of my everyday life, which I had at last succeeded in breaking down, come back to me with renewed force.

Inevitably I start counting the days. In another week I will have to pack my trunks again, get into town, and start looking for a cab. Then I will have to put up with the deafening noise of a carriage crammed with revoltingly ugly people; and then there will be the arrival in Paris, and, after a restless night in new surroundings, the return to all the horrors of an existence shattered by the miserable trafficking of thought, the constantly mistaken conjectures of the senses, the perspicacious antipathies one must try to overcome in order to eat and pay the rent!

Oh! To think that there will always be a Before and After, and never a lasting Now!

And now memories of previous returns come back to me; I recall the cheerlessness of station arrivals, and the forgotten filthiness of the streets; I recall the spiritual discomfort of an apartment chilled by absence, and the impossibility of settling down for several days, or of avoiding being distracted by all the intolerable chatter spewed forth by people incapable of remaining silent.

Everything comes back to me ; I count up the trips made in search of money ; I foresee the eager offers, the almost courteous refusals, the generous advice, and all the slow-moving sewer of the relentless existence into which I must once more plunge.

And yet it is very comfortable lying on the bank beside the road ; the life of the fields is interrupted by falling night ; the old church stands out above the valley, which the shadows seem to hollow out and lengthen ; and through the church's nave, through the blank windows placed opposite each other, one can see the sky's dark vapours passing by !

But I cannot keep my mind on what I can see in the present ; so I try to take my thoughts backwards in time, and remind myself of the peaceful feeling that came to me, the day before, on a deserted hill-top, where juniper-trees stood isolated amidst blocks of granite, covered with green needles and blue berries.

My memory refuses to be moored to this image as well, and as soon as it is evoked it disappears. Finally, I strive to retire within myself, to search my soul, to staunch my spurting worries, to drive back the welling anguish, but I turn in vain to specious beliefs, plausible reasons and insidious hopes. The poor Present, which has at last been granted to me, is already finished ; my siesta amidst suffering is over, and all the hatred, all the scorn which have been poured on me come to the fore once more, and sound Boot-and-saddle, while I am beset and obsessed by the advertisements in this odious newspaper.

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Consols are going up, industrial securities are holding firm ; Panama is going down, Suez is steady—Crossword and metagram : correct solutions : *Paul Ychinel, le père Spicace, Astre à Caen, Lady Scorde, Miss Tigry, les oedipes du café du Grand-Balcon*. Rowland's macassar and Guyot's tar. Russian corn cure and Wlinsi paper. — Dry-nurse seeks employment. — No more bald heads ! Fresh growth certain, and guaranteed ; judge for yourself ! Malleron.—Hidden disorders, ulcers, discharges, scurf : Chable, Emmanuel, Péchenet, Albert !



## STILL LIFES

### THE HERRING

*To Alfred Alavoine.*

THY robe, O herring, contains the full palette of the setting sun, the patina of old bronze, the gleam of burnished gold, the sandal-wood and saffron tints of autumn leaves !

Thy head, O herring, blazes like a golden helm, and thine eyes are like black nails driven into circles of copper !

Every sad, gloomy shade, and every gay radiant huc, deaden and light up thy scaly robe, each in their turn.

Mingled with the black pitch of Judaea and Cassel, the scorched browns and greens of scheelite, the Van Dyck browns, the Florentine bronzes, and the russet tints of dead leaves, comes the brilliance of verdigrised gold, yellow amber, stonecrop, ochre, chrome, and bloody oranges.

O thou smoked one, so glistening yet lustreless, when I contemplate thy coat of mail I think of the paintings of Rembrandt, with their proud heads, sun-kissed flesh, and jewels sparkling on black velvet ; I see once more his rays of light shining in the darkness, his trails of gold-dust in the shadows, his sunshine blazing through dark archways.

### ÉPINAL PRINT

*To Eugène Montrosier.*

It was a little town, near Brussels, in Brabant. The houses, outlined by a pale stroke of ink, stood out very faintly against a sky of grey paper.

In this town, amid serrated, turreted roofs, and spirelets like snuffers or upturned cones, there stood a church surmounted by a cross, and an old keep pierced by *meurtrières*.

And there was also a large flesh-coloured turret, capped by a



bright red roof ; it stood at the corner of an inn, on whose yellow balcony a lady was leaning, dressed in a fluted ruff and a dress of the same red as the turret's roof.

The little town seemed to be full of interest, for there were no fewer than six people in the square, cross-examining an old man. Two of them were fine gentlemen dressed in Louis XIII style ; one of them, a fat, beardless man with the chubby, rosy-cheeked face of a broad joker and a boon companion, dressed in a jerkin of crude vermilion and a large white collar whose points were soaked in the red from his coat, was holding in one hand a grey felt hat spotted with the blue that had been used to paint his breeches ; with his other hand he was showing the old man a tankard of beer which was foaming on a green-daubed table with four yellow legs. These legs must have been luminous, because great patches of the same colour were spreading around them.

The old man was refusing the fat man's offer ; and the fingers he had extended towards him, as though to reject the gifts of Artaxerxes, touched his coat, and became tinged with purple from it.

The other gentleman was thinner, and had a little moustache. Apart from this slight difference, they were very alike.

Both of them had pinkish faces, with everything, lips, eyes, ears, hair, merging into the same colour ; sometimes this colour had even gone outside their faces, and flowed over their clothes, and the nearby houses. The man with the moustache was smiling amiably, and holding a large hat whose yellow colour had run over his hands. The old man looked very old and tired ; he was dressed sordidly, in an old scarlet cap, a green coat flecked with reddish brown stains, covered with darns and patches, and barbed at the bottom like a lobster's tail, and a great blue cloak, over which there flowed a long beard so white, so white, that it looked like billows of steam coming from his mouth and nose, and spreading down to the ground. Both of the others were saying to him :

" Good day, sir. Allow us the pleasure of sharing your company a while."

But though he looked so old and tired, he was replying : " Gentlemen, I suffer a great misfortune, I never stop, I must always go on walking."

And they replied in chorus : " Come into this inn, sit down ; come and drink a tankard of refreshing beer ; we will entertain you as best we can."

But the old man replied once more : " Truly, gentlemen, your kindness overwhelms me, but I cannot sit down, I must remain standing."

Then the fine gentlemen were amazed, and the fat one said to him : " We would be very interested to know your name."

" Are you not that old man about whom everyone talks so much, he whom the Scriptures call the Wandering Jew?" added the thin man.

And the old man, whose beard was so white, so white, that it looked like billows of steam coming from his mouth and nose, replied : " Isaac Laquedem is my name, and I am eighteen hundred years old ; yes, my children, I am the Wandering Jew." Then he told them of his long travels around the world, his incessant journeys over hills and dales, by land and sea ; and then, when he had finished his lamentable story, he cried out : " Time presses ; good-bye, gentlemen, thank you for your civility, thank you again." And he went off, leaning on his long stick, while a little angel in a red robe and green wings, with a sword in one hand, and a streak of gamboge coming from the other, signalled to him to walk, and to go on walking for ever !

This angel was hovering above a little town near Brussels, in Brabant. It was hovering over houses outlined by a pale stroke of ink, which stood out very faintly against a sky of grey paper.

It was hovering above serrated turreted roofs, and spirelets like snuffers or upturned cones ; above a church surmounted by a cross, above an old keep pierced with *meurtrières*.

## PARAPHRASES

### NIGHTMARE

FIRST, out of the shadows pierced here and there by the light of day, there loomed an enigmatic, sorrowful yet haughty face :—the face of a Chaldean magus, of an Assyrian King, of old Sennacherib raised from the dead, and pensively, disconsolately watching the river of the ages as it flows along, ever widened by the turgid waves of human folly.

He raised to his lips a slender, tapering hand like that of a child, and opened an eye, through which there seemed to pass all the eternal sorrows which since Genesis have haunted the souls of humankind.

Was it the primitive shepherd of men watching his immortal flocks pass by, jostling, even murdering each other for the sake of a tuft of grass or a piece of bread?—Was it the face of immemorial Melancholy finally admitting, in face of Joy's avowed impotence, the uselessness of everything?—Or was it the myth, revived once more, of Truth recognizing man even when he passes hidden by different masks and finery; always the same man, afflicted by the same virtues and vices, the same man, whose original ferocity has in no way lessened under the strain of the centuries, but merely hidden itself behind that grace of civilised peoples, discreet, penetrating hypocrisy?

Be that as it may, this mysterious face haunted me; in vain I tried to search its distant gaze; in vain I tried to probe the secrets of its face, which purely personal suffering could never have furrowed in such a way; but the mournful, hieratic image disappeared, this modern vision of ancient times was succeeded by a dreadful landscape, a dark and dismal swamp of stagnant water; this water stretched as far as the horizon, where the sky descended like an ebony panel, all of one piece; no Milky Way formed a white join in its wood, nor did any star shine like a silver screw.

From this gloomy water, under that opaque sky, there suddenly sprang the monstrous stem of an incredible flower.

It looked like a rod of rigid steel, on which metallic flowers were growing, hard and flawless. Then buds shot forth, like tadpoles,

like growing heads of fetuses, like whitish balls, without noses, eyes or mouths; finally one of these buds, luminous, as though smeared with some kind of phosphorous oil, burst, and swelled out into a pale head that swayed silently in the night above the waters.

An immense, purely personal grief emanated from this ghastly flower. In the expression on its features there was the despair of a tired Pierrot, an old acrobat weeping over his weakening loins, and at the same time the distress of an ancient lord tormented by spleen, of an attorney condemned for fraudulent bankruptcies, or of an old judge who, after elaborate crimes, has ended up in the courtyard of a prison.

I asked myself what incredible wrongs this pallid face must have suffered, and what solemn expiation must cause it to shine over the waters like a lighted buoy, like a beacon indicating to the passengers of Life the appalling reefs hidden beneath the waters they plough through as they sail towards the Future!

But I did not even have time to form the reply to the question I was asking myself. The terrible flower of shame and suffering, the fantastic living *nelumbo*, had withered, and its phosphoric nimbus had faded away. The pale attorney, the cadaverous acrobat, the pallid lord, had been succeeded by a vision no less horrible.

Another sheet of water, cloudy and diseased, but with no sky above it, filled an immense lake, a gigantic reservoir with pillars, like those of the *Dhuis* and the *Vanne*. From the vaults above it came a sepulchral silence; faint daylight was filtering through the frosted glass of hidden skylights; an icy tunnel-wind froze you to the marrow, and, amidst this solitude, an intense irrepressible fear pinned you, gasping, to the bench running like a quay along the water's edge.

And then, beneath these silent, fearsome vaults, strange creatures suddenly sprang up. A bodiless head started flitting around, humming like a top, a head with one enormous Cyclopean eye, and a wide mouth like that of a skate, separated by a deep groove from an incredible nose, a bailiffs' sordid nose, crammed with snuff! —This white, shrivelled head stood on a kind of big-bellied pot, and radiated a light of its own, illuminating the dancing shapes of other, almost amorphous heads, unformed skull embryos, and blurred infusoria, vague flagellata, indefinite monera, and strange bits of protoplasm like *Haeckel's Bathybius*, but less gelatinous and formless!

And now this formation of living matter disappeared in its turn, the vile shape of the head faded away, and the obsessive, motionless water finally vanished.

There was a short respite in the nightmare. But suddenly a black-cored sun emerged from the shadows, flashing like a medal, with uneven but regular golden rays. At the same time, flower petals began to fall from unknown space, bulbs with imperceptible pupils squinting in them bounded around like billiard balls, and a coffee merchant's sieve hung suspended in the air; a naked arm was sweeping the air beneath them, the arm of a superhuman juggler with hideous eyes, enlarged and fashioned by surgical operations with pupils like hubs in the middle of wheels.

This man, as he juggled with planets, kitchen utensils and flowers, had the cruel air of a savage Gaul, the imperious mien of a sanguinary bard;— and the horror of his eyes, dilated as though by an iron ring, fascinated you and made your hair stand on end.

At last there was a lull; the mind, carried away by these hallucinations, tried to cling on and make fast at some shore or other;— but the scene went on unfolding, like an ancient, analogous scene which for years had been almost forgotten. In place of the flower of the marches, another human flower, seen not long ago in an exhibition, came back and settled down, showing yet another variant of this gloomy conception.

And then the terrifying water dried up, and in its place desolate steppes loomed up, soil torn by volcanic eruptions, ravaged by blizzards and crevasses scorified with slag. One seemed to be visiting, on an imaginary journey on Beer and Maedler's map, one of the silent amphitheatres on the moon, the Sea of Nectar, of the Humour, or of the Crimes; and, in an empty atmosphere, in such cold as one had never felt before, one seemed to be wandering in the middle of this dead, silent desert, terrified by the mountains which raise their cup-shaped craters to vertiginous heights around it; such as Tycho, Calippus and Eratosthenes.

And on this desolate planet the white soil nurtured the same stem as had sprung from the black waters; buds were opening on its metallic branches, too, and a round, pale head was swaying at its summit; but its grief merged more ambiguously with the irony of a ghastly smile.



Suddenly the nightmare was completely shattered, and I experienced a frightful awakening, as the inflexible features of Certainty appeared, and as she seized me in her iron hand and brought me back to life, to the breaking day, and to the tedious tasks brought by each new morning.

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Such were the visions evoked by an album dedicated to the glory of Goya by Odilon Redon, the Prince of mysterious dreams, the landscape-painter of subterranean waters and disrupted deserts of lava ; Odilon Redon, the Oculist Comprachico of the human face, the acute Lithographer of Grief, the Magician of the pencil, who, for the pleasure of a few aristocrats of art, has strayed into the democratic *milieu* of modern Paris.

## THE OVERTURE TO TANNHAUSER

IN a landscape such as nature would never be able to create, in a landscape where the sun approaches, in paleness, the exquisite, superb dilution of golden yellow, in a sublime landscape where, under an unhealthy luminous sky, the crystal-white peaks above the bluish valleys shine with an opalescent gleam ; in a landscape inaccessible to painters, for it is almost entirely composed of visual chimeras, of silent quiverings and moist tremblings of the air, a chant is heard, a singularly stately chant, a majestic hymn launched from the souls of the tired pilgrims as their company advances.

And this chant, devoid of all feminine effusions, of all wheedling prayers which endeavour to obtain, through the perilous antics of the modern conception of grace, that meeting with God which is reserved for a few only, continues with that certainty of pardon, that conviction of redemption, which were so natural to the humble souls of the Middle Ages.

Worshipping and proud, manly and upright, it speaks of the terrible weariness of the sinner who has plumbed the depths of his conscience, and of the unalterable disgust of the spiritual *voyant* when faced by the iniquities and crimes that have accumulated there ; it asserts, too, after the cry of faith in redemption, the supernatural happiness of a new life, and the inexpressible joy of a new



heart lit, like Mount Tabor, by the rays from the mystical Supreme Being.

The chant weakens and gradually dies away; the pilgrims go into the distance, the sky darkens, the luminous daylight grows dim, and soon the orchestra floods the unbelievable yet authentic scene with crepuscular gleams. There is a fine gradation of colours, a confusion of shades, a mica of sounds, which all die away as the last echo of the hymn is lost in the distance;—and night falls over this intangible Creation formed by the genius of one man, and now drawn back in anxious anticipation.

And now a cloud unfolds, iridescent with the colours of rare flora, the dead violet, the expiring pink and the moribund white of anemones; it scatters its fleecy billows in all directions, and they grow darker in colour, exhaling unknown scents in which the Biblical aroma of myrrh is mingled with the voluptuous, elaborate odours of modern perfumes.

Suddenly, in the midst of this musical scene, this fluid, fantastic scene, the orchestra breaks out, painting the figure of the advancing Tannhäuser with a few decisive strokes, sketching him in from head to toe with heraldic melody;—and the shadows become filled with gleams; the whorls of the clouds take on rearing shapes, like thighs, and palpitate like swelling breasts; the blue precipices of the heavens are peopled with nude figures; cries of desire, lascivious shouts, outbursts from a carnal Beyond, gush forth from the orchestra, and then, above the wavy espalier of ecstatic, swooning nymphs, Venus arises; not the Venus of the ancients, the old Aphrodite, whose flawless lines made gods and men breathless amidst the lusts of paganism, but a Venus more terrible and profound, a Christian Venus, if it be possible to commit the unnatural sin of joining these two words!

Indeed, she is no longer, as understood by Greece's salacious artistry, the unfading Beauty devoted solely to earthly joys, to artistic and sensual excitements; she is the incarnation of the Spirit of Evil, the effigy of impotent Lust, the image of the magnificent, irresistible Fiend, as, ceaselessly on the look-out for Christian souls, she brandishes her delightful, maleficent arms.

In the form in which Wagner has created her, this Venus, the emblem of the material nature of the individual, the allegory of Evil struggling with Good, the symbol of our interior hell in opposition to our internal heaven, takes us back across the centuries with one bound, back to the indestructible greatness of an allegorical

poem by Prudentius, that living Tannhäuser, who, after years devoted to debauchery, tore himself from the arms of the victorious Demon and took refuge in penitent adoration of the Virgin.

Indeed, the Venus of the musician seems to be the direct descendant of the poet's *Luxuria*, the white *Belluaria*, steeped in perfumes, who crushes her victims under piles of enervating flowers: the Wagnerian Venus seems to attract and captivate men like the most dangerous of Prudentius' deities, her whose name the author could not write without trembling: *Sodomita Libido*.

But although in conception she recalls the allegorical entities of the Middle Ages, she adds to this a spice of modernity, and introduces a current of intellectual refinement into this heaving mass of wild sensual delights; she seems to add heightened sensations to the more naive canvas of ancient times, and, through this excitement of nervous acuity, assures more certainly the defeat of the hero, who has been so suddenly initiated into the lascivious cerebral complexities of the exhausted age in which we live.

Tannhäuser's soul gives way, and his body succumbs. Smothered with ardent whispers and ineffable promises, he falls, delirious, into the arms of the foul clouds which encircle him; his melodic personality is obliterated by the triumphant hymn of Evil.—Then the tempest of roaring flesh, the electrifying flashes that are bursting in the orchestra, die down; the incomparable sound of the brass which seems a transposition of blinding purples and sumptuous-golds, subsides;—and a tenuous, divine whispering, a scarcely perceivable rustling of airy blue and pink sounds, trembles in the already lightening night air. Dawn appears, the hesitant sky whitens as though painted by harp sounds, and takes on tentative colours, which gradually become more definite, and finally stand resplendent amidst the magnificent alleluia, the shattering splendour of drums and brass. The sun appears, widens out like a fan, splits the thickening line of the horizon, and climbs as though from the bottom of a lake whose surface shines like watered silk as it reflects the rays of light. In the distance hovers the hymn of intercession, the pilgrims' hymn of faith, cleansing the last wounds of the soul torn by the diabolical struggle;—and, in an apotheosis of light, in the glory of Redemption, the Body and the Spirit are intermingled, Evil and Good are reconciled, Lust and Purity are knit together by the two motifs which wind around, mingling the rapid, exhausting kisses of the violins, the dazzling, distressing caresses of the tense, fidgety strings, with the calm, majestic, spreading chorus,

the melody of mediation, the hymn of the kneeling soul as it celebrates its final submission, its unshakeable stability in the bosom of the Deity.

Trembling, entranced, you come out of the vulgar hall in which the miracle of this music of essence has taken place, carrying indelibly in your memory this Tannhäuser Overture, this prodigious initial summary of the confused greatness of the three-act drama.

## THE SIMILITUDES

*To Théodore Hannon.*

THE hangings were lifted, and the strange beauties crowding behind the curtain advanced towards me, one after the other.

First of all there were vague warmths, languishing vapours of heliotrope and orris, vervain and reseda, which filled me with the strange, plaintive charm aroused by hazy autumn skies and full moons of phosphorescent whiteness; and women with blurred faces, flowing lines, ash-blond hair, pink complexions with the bluish tinge of hydrangeas, and skirts rainbowed with fading colours, came towards me, spreading a scented fragrance around them, and mingling with the plaintive colours of old silk, and the calm, almost sleepy aroma of old face-powders which have been shut up for many years in an old chest, far from the light of day.

Then this vision took flight, and was followed by a delicate odour of bergamot and frangipane, moss-rose and cypress, *maréchale* and new-mown hay, an odour which had been lingering here and there amidst this concert of insipidity, creating an occasional flash of pink, like one of Fragonard's sensual touches; it suddenly sprang up, dainty and amorous, with its snow-sprinkled hair, its caressing mischievous eyes, and its great furbelows of azure and peach-blossom; but gradually it faded, and then vanished completely.

The *maréchale*, the hay, the heliotrope, the orris, all this palette of lascivious and calmer shades, were succeeded by brighter tints, bolder colours, stronger odours: sandalwood, havana, magnolia, the perfumes of creoles and of coloured women.

After the mild fluids, the misty glazes, the caressing, drowsy odours, after the pale blues and feeble pinks, after the splashes of colour and the highlights of the tropics, came the foolish cries of

drivelling vulgarity ; heavy ochres, dull, dark greens, thick browns, melancholy greys, dark bluish slate-greys ; and heavy waves of syringa, hyacinth, and Portugal water, with laughing, radiant faces ; the faces of vulgar beauties with black, pomaded hair, cheeks lacquered with rouge and plastered with powder, and skirts hanging gracelessly on their fat, flabby bodies. Then there came spectral apparitions, nightmare creations, hallucinatory obsessions, standing out against turgid backgrounds of sulphurous verdigris, floating in mists of pistachio and phosphorous blue ; gloomy, demented beauties, steeping their strange charms in the dull melancholy of violet, or the burning bitterness of orange ; women from Edgar Allan Poe or Baudelaire, striking tormented poses, with their lips bleeding cruelly, and their eyes throbbing with passionate nostalgia and widened by supernatural joys ; Gorgons, Titanides, unearthly women from whose magnificent skirts there flow nameless perfumes, breaths of languor and passion which bore into your temples, and confuse and overthrow your reason more easily than the fumes of Indian Hemp ; figures worthy of that great modern master, Eugène Delacroix.

These evocations of another world, these blazes of savagery, these crepuscular tonalities, these stimulating emanations disappeared in their turn, and a trumpet-blast of colours burst forth, incredible, unparalleled.

A shimmer of purple sparks, a fanfare of odours multiplied to their maximum density, a triumphal march, a radiant apotheosis, was now framed in the doorway ; and a series of girls, flaunting on their rich skirts all the fire, the magnificence, the excitement of the reds, from the carmine of lacquer to the flames of nasturtiums and the splendour of scarlets and vermilions, and all the ostentation, the glow, the brilliance of the yellows, from the pale chromes to the gamboges, the daffodil-yellows, the golden ochres and the cadmia, came towards me, with crimson, overflowing flesh, russet, gold-flecked manes, voracious lips and glowing eyes ; as they came, they panted out passionate breaths of patchouli and amber, musk and opopanax, terrifying breaths, full of hot-house sultriness ; shrieks, auto-da-fés, furnaces of red and yellow, conflagrations of colours and scents.

Then everything faded away, and the primary colours, yellow, red and blue, and the parent-scents of the composite perfumes, Tonquin musk, tuberose and amber, came together in a long kiss before my eyes.

As their lips touched, the tints grew fainter, and the odours died away : like phoenix rising from the ashes, they would live again in another form, that of secondary colours and derivative scents.

Red and yellow were succeeded by orange ; yellow and blue, by violet ; even the non-colours, black and white, appeared in their turn, and from their clumsily entwined arms there fell the colour grey, a fat lout of a girl whom a quick kiss from blue refined into a dreamy Cydalise : pearl-grey.

And in the same way as the colours merged and were reborn in a new form, the scents mingled and lost their origin, transforming themselves, according to the relative vivacity or languor of their caresses, into multiple or rare offspring : *maréchale*, formed from musk, amber, tuberose, acacia, jasmine and orange-blossom ; *frangipane*, extracted from bergamot and vanilla, saffron and the balm of musk and amber ; *jockey-club*, born of the coupling of tuberose and orange-blossom, muslin and orris, lavender and honey.

And others . . . others . . . nuances of lilac and sulphur-yellow, salmon-pink and fawn, lacquers and cobalt greens, others . . . others yet again . . . muslin, spikenard, colours and scents of all shades, light and dark, delicate and heavy, continued to infinity.

\* \* \* \* \*

I woke up—nothing left—But, at the foot of my bed, Icareia, my cat, had lifted her right leg and was licking her coat of ginger fur with her pink tongue.

## NOTES

### THE FOLIES-BERGERE

Appeared in the 1880 edition of the *Croquis Parisiens*, and later, in 1882, in the *Revue Littéraire*. The Folies-Bergère were in the Rue Richer, and opened in 1869. Around the theatre itself there were vast promenades.

#### I

1. *A red ribbon*.—The Légion d'Honneur.

#### II

1. *Ludovic de Francmesnil*.—A constant companion of Huysmans at this time. An employee of the Ministry of War, who had been to school with Huysmans at the Pension Hortus. For further details, see: Jean Jacquinot: *Ludovic de Vente de Francmesnil*. (Bulletin Huysmans No. 22.)

#### III

1. *Leon Hennique*.—Novelist, one of the *Groupe de Medan*.
2. *Opopanax*.—A scent very popular in Paris at the time.
3. *Barrières*.—The outskirts of Paris, around and beyond the old *barrières*. Usually a rather disreputable district. The word here denoted the popular nature of the conductor's polkas.

#### IV

1. *Paul Daniel*.—A friend who worked in the *Prefecture de la Seine*.

#### V

1. *Chibouk*.—A long Turkish pipe.
2. *Almah*.—An Egyptian dancing-girl.
3. *Old Bugeaud*.—"Le père Bugeaud," the soldiers' nickname for Marshal Bugeaud, who, between 1836 and 1847, consolidated the French conquest of Algeria, and extended it to the Sahara.
4. *Spahis*.—Algerian native troopers.
5. *Spencer*.—A short jacket.
6. *Marianne*.—The female symbol of the Republic.
7. *Belleville*.—A working-class area of Paris.

#### VI

1. *Deburau*.—A famous French mime (1796-1846). Created the character of Pierrot with great success.
2. *The Hanlon-Lees*.—Famous English acrobats.

#### VII

1. *Robert le Diable*.—Opera by Meyerbeer, first performed at the Paris Opera in 1831.



## VIII

1. *Louvois fountain*.—The fountain in the Place Louvois, opposite the Bibliothèque Nationale.
2. *Bouillon Duval*.—Pierre-Louis Duval founded twelve cheap restaurants in Paris, known as *Bouillons Duval*.

## THE BALL AT THE BRASSERIE EUROPEENNE IN GRENELLE

First appears in the 1886 edition, though a very different version, entitled *Tabatières et Riz-Pain-Sel*, appeared in *Le Gaulois* of June 18th, 1880. It was to have been the first chapter of the novel *Le Gros-Caillou*.

1. *Grenelle*.—Commune incorporated in Paris in 1860, and now forming part of the 15th *arrondissement*. On the opposite side of the river from Auteuil.
2. *Pepla*.—The pepulum was an outer robe worn by women in Ancient Greece.
3. *Cavalier seul*.—A step in the quadrille.
4. *Gros-Caillou*.—Part of Grenelle, near the École Militaire.
5. *Salon de Mars* and *Bouge de l'Ardoise*.—Presumably two local brothels.
6. *Piles of saucers*.—The method of calculating the money owed for drinks used to be to count the saucers left on the table.
7. *Avenue de Lowendal*.—The avenue running past the École Militaire, starting from *Les Invalides* and ending in the *Place Cambronne*.

## PARISIAN TYPES

## THE BUS CONDUCTOR.

This article was published in *La Cravache* on November 19th, 1876, and was included in the 1880 edition of the *Croquis*.

1. *Sieve of the Danaïdes*.—In Hades, the Danaïdes were condemned to the endless task of filling a sieve with water.
2. *Get on, numbers 8, 9, and 10*.—The French system of queuing is to take a numbered ticket. The conductor then calls out the numbers of the people who are entitled to get on.

## THE STREET-WALKER.

Included in the 1880 edition of the *Croquis*.

1. *Piccolo*.—A kind of local wine.
2. *Hôpital de Lourcine*.—A hospital founded in 1836 for the treatment of women with venereal diseases.

## THE WASHERWOMAN.

Included in the 1880 edition of the *Croquis*.

1. *Nausicaa*.—In the *Odyssey*, Nausicaa and her maidens come to the sea-shore to wash their clothes, and discover the shipwrecked Odysseus.
2. *Chosen at mi-carême*.—A queen of washerwomen used to be chosen in Paris on the feast of *mi-carême*. (Mid-Lent.)
3. *Rue aux Ours*.—A street joining the Rue St. Denis and the Boulevard de Sebastopol.

## THE JOURNEYMAN BAKER.

Appeared in *La Cravache*, December 17th, 1876, *L'Éclair*, October, 1877, and *L'Artiste*, April, 1878. Included in the 1880 edition of the *Croquis*.

1. *Gilles*.—A painting by Watteau, representing the traditional figure of Gilles, or Pierrot.
2. *The outer boulevards*.—The boulevards following the line of the old fortifications. Usually a fairly disreputable area.

## THE CHESTNUT-MAN.

First appeared in *La Cravache*, December 3rd, 1876, and was then included in the 1880 *Croquis*.

1. *Tafia*.—A type of rum.

## THE HAIRDRESSER.

An addition in the 1886 edition of the *Croquis*. Appeared in *La Vie Moderne*, February 19th, 1881.

## LANDSCAPES

## THE BIEVRE.

First appeared in *La République des Lettres*, February 1877, and was included in the 1880 edition of the *Croquis*.

1. *Henry Céard*.—A member of the *Groupe de Médan*, he was originally introduced to Huysmans by Ludovic de Francmesnil. An employee of the Ministry of War. He later collaborated with Jean de Caldain on the series of articles, *Huysmans Intime*.
2. *Rue du Pot-au-Lait* and *Chemin de la fontaine à Mulard*.—These two roads ran around a sharp bend in the Bievre, just inside the outer fortifications.
3. *Butte aux Cailles*.—This hillock stood between this bend in the river and the Place d'Italie.
4. *Panthéon*.—Formerly the Church of Ste. Geneviève, built by Soufflot in the late 18th Century. Stands in the middle of the Quartier Latin, at the head of Rue Soufflot, in the 5th arrondissement. The vast cupola is 275 ft. high.
5. *Val-de-Grâce*.—Abbey in the Rue St. Jacques, in the 5th arrondissement, converted into a Military hospital in 1793. The church was completed in 1665, the large dome being its most striking feature.

## THE "CABARET DES PEUPLIERS".

Appears in the 1880 edition of the *Croquis*. This inn must have been near the Chemin des Peupliers, and the Poterne des Peupliers, which was the gate in the fortifications where the Bièvre entered Paris.

1. *Barrière Blanche*.—The way by which the Route de Fontainebleau left Paris.
2. *Bicêtre*.—A large hospital two kilometres from Paris, on a hill-side overlooking the Bièvre. It counts among its patients a large number of mental cases.

## THE RUE DE LA CHINE.

Appears in the 1880 *Croquis*. This street was in the 20th *arrondissement*, up beyond Père-Lachaise.

1. *Jules Bobin*.—Worked at the Ministry of War, and met Huysmans through Ludovic de Francmesnil. He was nick-named "the Professor", and introduced many of his friends to much early French literature, especially 16th-century and early 17th-century poetry.
2. *Ménilmontant*.—A commune annexed to Paris in 1860, and now one of the most populous districts in the 20th *arrondissement*.
3. *The Gobelins*.—The district, by the Bièvre, in which the royal tapestry factory of the Gobelins was created.
4. *Hôpital Tenon*.—Built in the Rue de la Chine in the years 1870-1878. At first it was called the Hôpital de Ménilmontant, but was given its present name in 1874, in memory of the surgeon Tenon.

## THE VIEW FROM THE NORTHERN RAMPARTS OF PARIS.

Appears in the 1880 *Croquis*.

1. *Parc Monceaux*.—The Parc Monceau was created in 1778 for the Duc de Chartres. It contained every type of "folly": obelisks, Gothic dungeons, ruined temples, etc. Many of these follies still remain in the present public park. The author here refers to it in the plural, meaning thereby any kind of artificial park.

## FANTASIES AND FORGOTTEN CORNERS

## PROSE BALLAD TO THE TALLOW CANDLE.

Originally appeared in *Musée des Deux Mondes*, May 15th, 1876, *l'Artiste*, August 2nd, 1877, and then in the 1880 *Croquis*, in the section *Petits Coins*.

1. *Gabriel Thyébaut*.—Employed at the Préfecture de la Seine. A legal expert, one of the Francmesnil-Bobin Group. A brilliant and witty conversationalist.
2. *Gerard Dow* (or *Dov* or *Dou*).—A Dutch painter (1613-1675), a pupil of Rembrandt. He painted mainly domestic scenes.
3. *Schalken* (or *Schalcken*).—A Dutch painter (1643-1706), who above all studied the effects of artificial light. Two of his paintings in the Louvre are important examples of this: *Cérès un flambeau à la main cherchant sa fille*, and *Deux femmes dont l'une tient une bougie allumée*.

## DAMIENS.

Appears in the 1886 edition of the *Croquis*.

1. *Robert Caze*.—A journalist and novelist, with an extremely stormy private life.
2. *Rue Bonaparte*.—Leads from the river to Saint-Germain des Prés. A street famed for its antique-dealers and booksellers.
3. *Damiens*.—Robert François Damiens (1715-1757), attempted to kill Louis XV on January 5th, 1757. He only succeeded in inflicting a slight wound, and after barbarous tortures, was torn apart by horses on the Place de Grève.
4. *Place de Grève*.—Now the Place du Châtelet. It was the square on which important executions used to take place.

## THE PROSE POEM OF ROAST MEAT.

Appeared in the 1880 edition of the *Croquis*, in the sections *Petits Coins*.

1. *Alexis Orsat*.—A civil servant, who used to lunch every day with Huysmans in a restaurant in the Rue de Grenelle.

## A CAFE.

Appeared in the 1880 *Croquis*, in the section *Petits Coins*.

1. *Sacred ibis*.—The ibis was venerated by the ancient Egyptians.

## RITORNELLO.

Appeared in *Le Drageoir aux Épices* (1874), in *l'Artiste* of June 3rd, 1877, and in the 1880 *Croquis*, in the section *Petits Coins*.

## THE ARM-PIT.

Appeared in the 1880 *Croquis*, in the section *Fleurs de Narines*.

1. *Guy de Maupassant*.—The famous novelist, one of the *Groupe de Médan*.

## LOW TIDE.

Added in the 1886 *Croquis*.

1. *Rue Legendre*.—Runs south-west from the Avenue de Clichy.
2. *Batignolles*.—Part of the 17th *arrondissement*, up beyond the Boulevard de Courcelles.
3. *Epiphany bean-cakes*.—The "cake of kings," a flat cake eaten at the feast of Epiphany. The person who finds the bean in his portion is king for the day.
4. *Curtius Museum*.—A famous waxwork museum.

## OBSESSION.

Added in the 1886 *Croquis*.

1. *Edmond de Goncourt*.—The famous novelist, for whom Huysmans felt much admiration.
2. *Paul Ychinel* = Polichinelle.  
*Astre à Caen* = astrakhan.  
*Miss Tigry* = mistigri.  
*Le père Spicace* = le perspicace.  
*Lady Scorde* = les discordes.

## STILL LIVES

## THE HERRING.

Appeared in *Le Drageoir aux Épices*, the 1880 *Croquis*, and innumerable journals, as *Le Hareng Saur*. In the 1886 edition the title was changed to *Le Hareng*.

1. *Alfred Alavoine*.—Presumably some relation of the Alavoines, the friends of Huysmans' parents.
2. *Pitch of Judaea and Cassel*.—Jew's pitch. A slightly ironic phrase, pointing out that all Jews do not come from Judaea.
3. *Scheelite*.—A vitreous, many-coloured tungstate of calcium.

## ÉPINAL PRINT.

Appeared in *Musée des Deux Mondes*, April 15th, 1875, *l'Artiste*, July 22nd, 1877, and in the 1880 *Croquis*.

1. *Eugène Montrosier*.—The proprietor of the *Musée des Deux-Mondes*.
2. *Artaxerxes I.*—Famous for his generosity. Permitted the Jews who had remained in Babylon after the edict of Cyrus to return to Jerusalem.
3. *Isaac Laquédem*.—This is the name given in Flanders to the Wandering Jew. The famous song about him seems to have inspired Huysmans' dialogue:

E.g. "Des bourgeois de la ville  
De Bruxelles en Brabant,  
D'une façon civile  
L'accostent en passant  
Jamais ils n'avaient vu  
Un homme aussi barbu

N'êtes-vous point cet homme  
De qui l'on parle tant,  
Que l'Écriture nomme  
Isaac, Le Juif Errant.  
De grâce, dites-nous  
Si sûrement, c'est vous. . . .

*Huysmans:*

"N'êtes-vous point ce vieillard  
de qui l'on parle tant,  
celui que l'Écriture nomme  
le Juif-Errant."

Isaac Laquédem  
Pour nom me fut donné  
Né à Jerusalem  
Ville bien renommée  
Oui, c'est moi, mes enfants.  
Qui suis le Juif errant. . . ."

"Isaac Laquédem  
est mon nom."

"Oui, c'est moi, mes enfants  
Qui suis le Juif-Errant."

## PARAPHRASES

## NIGHTMARE.

Added in the 1886 edition.

1. *Sennacherib*.—King of Assyria, 705-681 B.C.
2. *Nelumbo*.—Egyptian lotus.
3. *Dhuis, Vanne*.—Two rivers whose waters are brought to Paris via large aqueducts.
4. *Infusoria*.—Protozoa developed in infusions of decaying organic matter.
5. *Flagellata*.—Groups of protozoa possessing *flagella*—delicate hair-like bits of protoplasm which serve as organs of locomotion.
6. *Monera*.—Amoebiform protozoa of the most elementary organization.
7. *Bathybius*.—A slimy matter dredged up from the bottom of the Atlantic, formerly thought to be amorphous living protoplasm.
8. *Haeckel*.—A German naturalist (1834-1919), who concentrated mainly on protozoa.
9. *Becr* (1797-1850) and *Maedler* (1794-1874). Two German astronomers who, among other things, drew a map of the moon.
10. *Tycho*.—Presumably named after Tycho Brahe (1546-1601), a Danish astronomer.
11. *Calippus, Eratosthenes*.—Presumably named after the Greek astronomers of those names.

## THE OVERTURE TO TANNHAUSER.

First appeared in the *Revue Wagnérienne*, April 8th, 1885, and was then put in the 1886 edition of the *Croquis*.

For a study of the sources of this piece, see: Jean Jacquinet: *Huysmans et l'Ouverture de Tannhäuser*. (*Bulletin Huysmans* No. 30.)

1. *Mount Tabor*.—The mountain on which, according to tradition, the Transfiguration took place.
2. *Prudentius*.—Early Christian poet (348-c. 410). In his *Psychomachia* he depicts the struggle of Christianity with paganism under the allegory of a struggle between the Christian virtues and the pagan vices.

## THE SIMILITUDES.

Appeared in *La République des Lettres*, August 6th, 1876, *l'Artiste*, December 9th, 1877, and then in the 1880 *Croquis*, in the section *Fleurs de Narines*.

1. *Théodore Hannon*.—Editor of *l'Artiste*, in which this piece first appeared. A poet, a great friend of Huysmans, living in Brussels.
2. *Titanides*.—The six female Titans who joined with their brothers in their battle against the Olympians.







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AMBASSADOR OF LOSS, a novel, by Michael Scarrott  
AFRICA IN SPAIN, by Philip Robinson